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*J. Ramsay MacDonald*

(1923-1925)

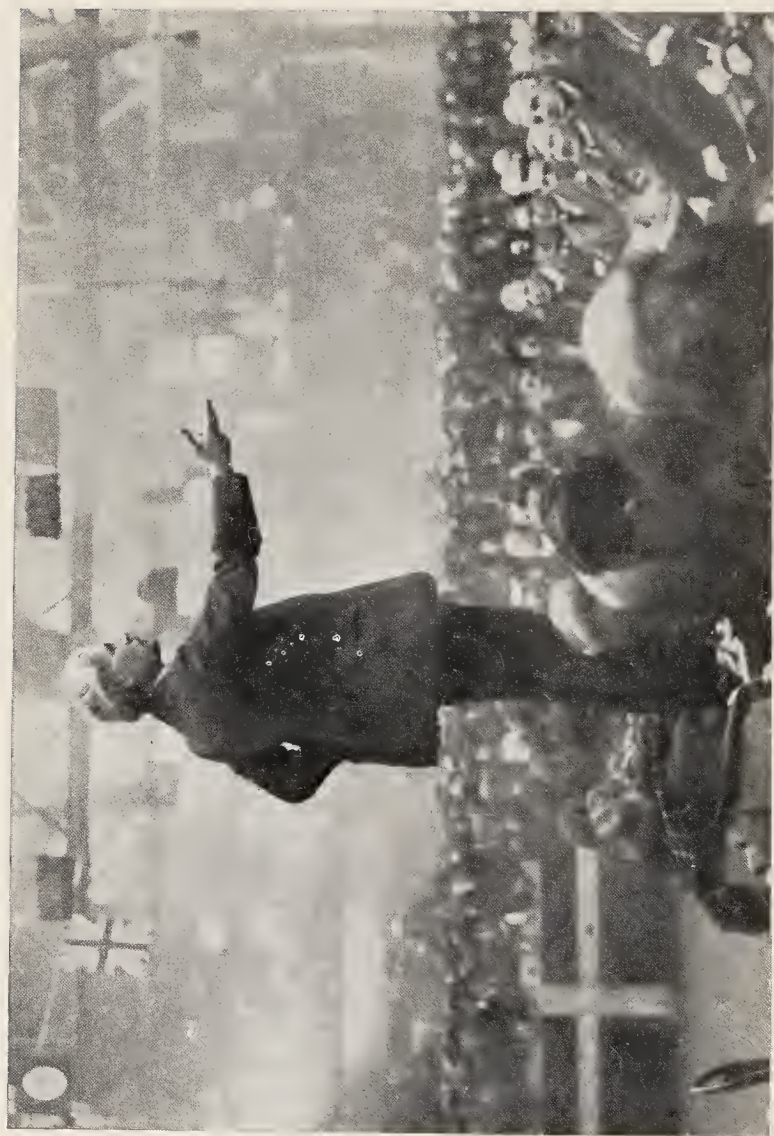


By the Same Author—

THE MAN OF TO-MORROW: J. R. MACDONALD  
FIT TO GOVERN!  
MARGARET BONDFIELD



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J. Ramsay MacDonald speaking in the Waverley Market, Edinburgh, on October 24th, 1924.



# *J. Ramsay MacDonald*

(1923-1925)

BY

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# *J. Ramsay MacDonald*

(1923-1925)

## CHAPTER I

### RETROSPECT

“We are not to be our own judges, here or hereafter.”—  
House of Commons, July 1923.

NEARLY four years ago Mr MacDonald wrote an article in which he said that Labour's first opportunity of government would come to it in a minority, and that, when the chance presented itself, the Party should take it. He did not then anticipate that the decision would be his. It was, however. It came in January 1924. Without hesitation, he took it. By common admission then and since the chance could neither have been given nor taken without him. Maker of the Party's national status, he had, by 1924, won an unassailable position as its leader, and during its nine months of office carried its administration on his back. Distinguished as were many of his colleagues, he was indispensable.

Although it is too soon yet for judgment to be passed on achievement, no one doubts to-day the courage and wisdom of the essay. Nor can anyone who remembers the conditions in which

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Labour entered office, the circumstances with which it had to cope, and the change which it produced, feel that 30th October 1924 closed the account. "1924," said Mr Garvin, writing on 28th December, "has delivered Europe from the darker shadows of the War"; the year ended with "a situation as a whole incomparably better than that of twelve months ago." In the effort to extend pacification from Central Europe to Russia, Labour fell. Time will recognise the rightness of the attempt as fully as the quality of the success. It will also do more impartial justice to the general effort of Labour than is to-day being meted out, and pass a balanced verdict on the man on whom the main burden of that effort rested.

At the time, so now, it is on him rather than on his government that discussion is focussed. Whatever Mr MacDonald may lack, he has always possessed the quality that excites curiosity, irritates and fascinates the mind. During the first six months of 1924 he achieved a personal popularity and esteem of a remarkable kind. Belief in him sprang up on all sides, even among persons normally indifferent to or sceptical about politicians. Interest, based on performance, was deepened by speeches revealing a man of wide culture and sympathy, and the curious, special originality of a mind that goes out on long

journeys and brings back sheaves of its own, rich in grain, for common enjoyment. He was felt to be different, not only intellectually but morally, from his competitors. That difference became the main asset of his Party.

After the London Settlement, however, another note began to sound. It gathered volume during the election and is sounding still. It is a note of disappointment, of puzzled questioning. The change may perhaps be put like this: From January to August 1924 he was, quite generally, seen as a figure at least as significant as that attempted to be sketched in *The Man of Tomorrow*. Indeed, the ambiguous impression that study was written to dispel had, thanks to the opportunity of action, cleared itself off. In its stead was a picture with a definite radiance. Since October 1924 the cloud of ambiguity has again descended. It could be seen collecting before the Liberal-Tory combination against the Russian Treaties made an election inevitable, and their plan to humiliate Labour on the Campbell case precipitated it; during the election it grew to a thundercloud; with the publication of the Red Letter the cloud burst. The Letter was the closing incident, not the cause of obscurity. It is outside the Party, not inside it, that the cry arose that Mr MacDonald had let his followers

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down. Although, both on that and on the Campbell case, tardy admissions from Tory Ministers have removed all substance in the charges exploited in October, their effect persists. Interest remains. Mr MacDonald has a brilliant past, a quite incalculable future; he cannot be left out. But attached to that interest is a question mark. Whether gladly or sadly, the people who talk about politics have, more or less, gone back to the views they held in 1923. With the larger, non-talkative body of opinion it is doubtful whether anything of this reversion has taken place. Inside the Labour Party certainly it has not done so. But the talkers, though probably in a minority everywhere, possess the sounding-board; and the noise they make is having its effect. That effect is easy to characterise. So far as Mr MacDonald is concerned, "the guilt is off the gingerbread."

The effect does not stop there, however. Whether or no it accounts for the election result, it has, most markedly, altered the general political outlook. The guilt is not only off him, and, inferentially, off his Party: it is off politics altogether, and the connection is direct. Just as belief in him lit a candle of hope in men's hearts, so its snuffing has spread a darkness. Last autumn a blight descended, and remains. It



affects all parties. A sort of apathetic gloom has settled down. People who talked in terms of peace six months ago talk to-day in terms of war. Hostility and suspicion have replaced goodwill. The re-attachment of British diplomacy to the Quai d'Orsay view of security ; the imperilling of all that was gained by the London Settlement in a panic "disarmament" stunt against Germany ; the iron heel set on Egypt ; the Russian Treaties torn up ; parliamentary control over diplomacy rescinded ; "aliens" to be persecuted—all this is taken as a matter of course. Parliament has become dull and lifeless ; the galleries are no longer crowded ; political talk languishes. It would seem that in so far as the sense of mystery which enshrouded Mr MacDonald before 1924 has again descended, it has brought with it a peculiar darkening of the moral sky. In pushing him off his pedestal we have pulled our own house about our ears.

Here is a curious phenomenon, which demands inspection, in our own interest. It is curious in itself. There are few instances of a double reversion of opinion, accomplished in so short a space of time, as that which has within a year lifted Mr MacDonald out of mystery on to a pinnacle of light and then dropped him back into mystery. It is still more curious in the

wide extension of its influence. The inspection will necessitate some survey, however brief and cursory, of Labour's entry into and tenure of office, as of the circumstances and manner of its exit. It will, further, demand some interrogation in detail of the great election mystery, the Red Letter, since with it is associated in the general mind, and, to some degree, in that of the Party, a bewilderment not wholly cleared by Mr Chamberlain's admissions on 15th December that there was no hold-up of the Letter and that the Note of 25th October was issued without the sanction of the Foreign Secretary. The Red Letter incident, however, cannot be understood unless it is seen in relation to the campaign of which it formed a part ; that campaign of " belittlement " admitted by a Liberal newspaper the other day to have been organised and planned.

The difficulties and drawbacks of such a contribution to contemporary history as this are obvious. There is no doubt some " secret history," as yet unrevealed. To that, in any shape or form, the writer has had no access. What follows depends purely on such information as can be gathered from an attentive study of known and public facts and of opinion as revealed through the newspapers, the columns of *Hansard*, etc., supplemented by the application to those facts of the

sort of character analysis that can be brought to bear on the figures in history. However little he may explain himself, a man's actions, writings, and speeches ; his conduct at trivial and critical junctures ; his political acts, ideas, and decisions ; the quality and occasion of his silence ; the impression his bearing makes on his associates—these things build up in the observer's mind a personality which can at least be tested by the extent to which it is self-consistent. If there remains an element of puzzlement, may not that be the tribute, awkward but sincere, which the average mind pays to the more richly endowed ? Few are the cases where a human being gifted with any infusion of genius has been other than strange to his contemporaries, who have handed on to us a picture containing elements that defy our analysis as they defied theirs.

No observer, of course, can claim either complete penetration or complete impartiality. Try as he may to see everything as it is, the limits of his own vision obstruct and a certain scale of values colours what he sees. A Socialist has prejudices, and had better admit them. However sincere the effort to keep opinion out, it will intrude. But the intention at least is, extenuating nothing, setting down naught in malice, to extract a truthful and coherent survey of facts.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GREAT ADVENTURE

“The nation calls somebody to work.”—House of Commons, 21st Jan. 1923.

As the result of the 1923 Election, a position was disclosed which sent politicians and journalists back to their history books. Mr Baldwin had asked for the verdict of the nation on a specific proposition—“Protection is the only remedy for Unemployment.” The nation had rejected it. To his policy it had, very definitely, said “No.” In the House and in the country, the official Tory programme was in a minority. To what, then, had the nation said “Yes”? Not to the Capital Levy or Labour’s positive social programme. There was no mandate for Socialism. Although the Party’s representation had risen by fifty seats, its vote had only gone up by a quarter of a million; it had been as lucky as a year later it was to be unlucky in the value of its votes in relation to seats. Even so, it had 191 out of a House of 615, or less than one in three.

At the same time, what the country wanted was plain—a Government capable of giving the world peace. The wreckage of the War and the after-war settlement cumbered the earth. The programme of “tranquillity” on which Mr Bonar Law had swept in, a year earlier, corresponded still to a general longing, conspicuously unfulfilled. Conditions had worsened; the Ruhr invasion had thrust a wedge into the delicate and complicated mechanism of European trade, and British acquiescence had earned for us nothing but contempt. Abroad, our prestige stood at zero; at home, the price was being paid in unemployment, homelessness, the misery of the workers in town and countryside, and the sacrifice of the children by the starvation of education and health services. The difficulties were as plain as the need: they promised destruction to anybody who tried to clean out the Augean stables.

Such was the situation in December 1923. Something of what, in a single year, had happened to public opinion was indicated by the fact that it expressed itself, almost at once, in the question—“What is Mr MacDonald going to do?” Advice, public and private, rained in upon him. There is no indication that he knew any doubt.

On the Monday that followed Thursday’s declaration of the poll, an informal luncheon

took place at which there were present a fairly representative collection of those who claim to express the mind of the Party. Before he arrived, opinions were mainly against taking on. Now, it appeared, was the chance to force a Tory-Liberal combination against Labour, which would enable the issue for the future to be quite clear—Socialism *versus* anti-Socialism. An ideal position for the propagandist. Our strength on the platform had been that we could always attack, need never defend. Were we to go in, we should expose a long front to criticism: we could no longer point to the failures of others and say how much better we could do. The only argument for taking on that anyone produced was for a purely spectacular action—a King's speech comprising a Socialist declaration, on which we should at once go out. This was hailed with approbation. There was eloquence, enthusiasm, conviction.

Mr MacDonald appeared. For a few moments he listened. Then he proceeded to riddle this case with such effect that its exponents had, almost while he was speaking, crossed over, most of them with the belief that they had, in fact, been there all the time. To stay out for the sake of a strong platform position was mere cowardice; to go in for the sake of coming out,



worse : a fatuous gesture. To run up a flag in order that it should be shot away, with the knowledge in our own minds and in those of our opponents that it was to be shot away, was the emptiest form of play-acting. Were our responsibilities confined to words ? Were there not things to be done that needed doing, and that we knew how to do ? Everything hinged upon a European settlement ; was it not a primary duty to try to secure it ? Moreover, apart from that, would we kindly consider what was to happen to the Party if it refused. It would lose even the Opposition.

At the end of half an hour the entire scene was changed. Apparently unaware of the revolution in their minds that had been produced, without any explicit statement from Mr MacDonald, those who had before been descanting on the superior charms of the wilderness, were absorbed in the question of who was to be the Foreign Secretary.

Mr MacDonald did not hesitate : the opportunity was there ; he looked at it, saw it for what it was. It was an opportunity ; it was also a call. Precisely because, as he was later to remind an audience at Brighton, " I am one of those who believe in the Socialist State, and I am neither ashamed of it nor afraid of it," that

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call to service was one he could not reject. Service, for the Socialist, is the major imperative. Someone, as he said in moving the Vote of Censure in the House of Commons on 21st January 1923, must do the nation's work. The evils were there; they were no abstractions. They represented a mass of human suffering and waste. To any patriotic man, to any patriotic party which believed in itself, they constituted a call to the pumps. Labour, in meeting them, would, he held, be able to demonstrate that its ideas worked, and that its men were competent. It would thereby dissipate one great illusion—the illusion of the “governing class”—and, in so doing, clear the path for the future. There was a risk. He saw but did not shrink from it.

From the national point of view, the call was clear. Not less so from the Socialist. Here, however, problems, special to a Socialist minority, raised menacing heads. Little understood outside, these require a word. Involved in Mr MacDonald's decision was a continuous conception of the character and function of the Labour Party, and of its emergence from a collection of soap-box propagandists to be a national party. As the War crisis showed, he was quite ready to return to the soap box when a real emergency, an issue of principle, arose. Even then his constantly held



intention was to re-unite the divided sections at the first opportunity. His activity from 1914 to 1922 cannot be understood, unless it is borne in mind that he had throughout two connected purposes: (1) the need to keep a body of opinion, unshaken in mind by the herd-passion of war, capable of standing on and for the more permanent truths it obscured ("The Socialist must keep his international mind"): (2) the necessity of keeping such contact with the larger body of Labour opinion as would save the Party, as a Socialist, democratic organisation of workers, intact, protect it against the shattering divisions which put Socialist organisations in other countries out of action, and enable it to be there, after the War, as a party, not as a mere collocation of sects. He succeeded. 1922 proved his success; 1923 confirmed and established it.

A national party, however, is committed to ways of being and of acting different from those appropriate to a sect. It has to think and act nationally. A national Socialist party has entered the stage when Socialism is no longer a battle-cry but a principle of organisation to be gradually and progressively applied. If it hesitates, refuses, fails to see that the hour of talk is over and the hour of work has sounded, it is lost and deservedly lost. True, the conditions of 1923-24 were ex-

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ceptionally difficult ; but it is by his handling of the difficulties, in which weaker spirits find excuse for pusillanimity, that the quality of a leader is tested.

The crisis had arrived much sooner than anyone could have foreseen. In December 1922, in the *Socialist Review*, Mr MacDonald had paid tribute to the way in which Mr Clynes had accepted his supersession as leader.

“ In this connection I take the opportunity of doing homage to my predecessor in office, Mr Clynes. His loyalty has been magnificent, and has set for every one an example so conspicuously fine that no one can fail to be moved by it. If it be that fate has success in its keeping for the Party, no one will have contributed more to that than Mr Clynes. In what I myself felt it was my duty to do, I was moved by what I considered were the best interests of the Party, and Mr Clynes as a colleague has been perfect. If I succeed in what I have placed before me to do, I shall want no harvest except the happiness in my own mind of having given Labour a Parliamentary position of power ; others must come in and complete the work, as in the course of nature that can hardly be reserved for me now.”

As the event proved, however, he was called upon himself to make the most critical judgment, take the most critical step in the history of Labour since the days when, as Secretary of the Labour Representative Committee, his determination and patience had created a political

party for it. Sentimental minds might be attracted by the "great refusal"; not his. Cowardice, however heroically masked, would spell stultification. His native aversion to heroics rejected that temptation.

At the same time he undoubtedly saw along how difficult a path he was preparing to lead his own Party: to how severe a test he was exposing not their loyalty alone, but their intelligence and grasp of political science. He has quoted with approval the remark made in Plutarch's *Life of Galba* that "to know how to obey requires as rational an education and as generous a disposition as to know how to command." Above all, they had to grasp and hold on to the strait limitations of a minority government.

"No minority ought to be asked to do the work of a majority. It is not sound democracy."<sup>1</sup>

Drama was outside the conditions. It might be expected: it would not and, in his view, should not occur.

So far as drama goes, it is doubtful whether he would ever admit it. There is no drama in scientific process; such can only be perceived by the man looking back, at a long distance, who can discern that in the selection of this alternative

<sup>1</sup> Albert Hall, 13th May 1924.

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rather than that, a whole train of cumulative consequences was involved.

“Hard as it is to know that time goes by with swift foot while good work almost defies doing, it is bad economy to make a year picturesque by the sacrifice of the substantial progress of a generation. This is not how Socialism is to come; this is how Socialism is to be retarded. Heaven is not taken by storm, but by honest thought which is not afraid to examine itself, and by honest action which is not averse to standing the test of time. Silently, in the night, when the watchers are looking elsewhere, a new spirit moulds life to itself. Only by looking back over a period of years can we mark the advance that has been made.

“Socialists must not forget that every measure of success that comes to them requires of them a more minute examination of what they are to do next. The further we go, the more stoical must we become.”<sup>1</sup>

This was written in 1909, but the idea behind it is present in everything he has written since. It is part of the “forbearance which is the essence of order and a condition of organic progress.”<sup>2</sup> In his mind the sacrifice of the dramatic, called for absolutely in the case of a minority, is actually inherent in government as such, and a condition of steady advance. It was this that made the speech at York (Easter 1924), in which he declared Labour was in power as well as in office, upsetting to some supporters. It seemed to deprive them

<sup>1</sup> *Socialism and Government*, p. xxx (1909).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11 (vol. ii.).

of their "excuse." He never used the minority argument in that way. "Whoever is in office has opportunity, and opportunity is always power." Special conditions it did impose, but, beyond them, any government is dependent on the degree of general consent it can secure. Even a Socialist government with a majority mandate for transforming change could, in the nature of things, only effect that change by gradual stages.

"Socialism is much more than the exposition of an idea. It will never succeed unless the idea is worked out in detail ; is applied to existing conditions and habits, and is used for the purpose of changing the evils of to-day into conditions more in conformity with the idea itself. We must have the larger vision, so that we may not only know how far short of the goal we are, but that we may have the energy to go on.

"But without the troublesome and patient work upon details we shall never do anything beyond creating a critical minority which may serve many useful purposes, but which will never bring Socialism." <sup>1</sup>

Always "the space between the 'is' and the 'is-to-be' must be traversed." <sup>2</sup>

That space, in 1924, was rocky. The *Punch* cartoon depicting "Mac-Hercules" contemplating his task, understated rather than exaggerated it. No government taking on as things were

<sup>1</sup> *New Leader*, Interview, 18th April 1924.

<sup>2</sup> *Socialism and Government*, p. 11 (vol. ii.).

could hope to do much more than clear the ground. It was bound to lay itself open to the charge of doing nothing "distinctive."

As for the distinctiveness, he probably did not greatly care. That "good wine needs no bush" is a proverb of which he makes excessive use in practice. Provided the work was to be good, "with labels I do not concern myself much." As for disappointments connected with extravagant hope from government, they must be met, sooner or later, and better soon than later. The minority difficulty was real; it might exaggerate the disappointment, and would present special problems of its own (notably in relation to armaments, etc.); but it was no excuse for shirking. Let those who hesitate face the alternative—the sacrifice of the Opposition in the House, the loss of credit in the country.

. . . . .

So soon as it was understood that, despite the appeals of Mr Garvin and others for a Liberal "Cabinet of Caretakers," Mr MacDonald was prepared to take on, the press got busy in an endeavour first, to induce the Liberal Party to keep Labour out on the crucial vote of No Confidence it was to move when Parliament re-assembled in January—Mr Baldwin's Government having decided to hang on to its offices



till then ; second, failing that, to blow up such a panic that Labour government would prove impracticable. The *Daily Mail* exhausted itself in screams that seem funny enough in the light of the event, but had, at the time, the effect of producing something of a panic in the City. Mr MacDonald meantime departed to Lossiemouth, and there kept his own counsel.

Pressmen, a large contingent of U.S.A. pressmen among them, buzzed round the small house he owns there, but they got nothing for their pains. They might have learned something from contemplating his garden, where one of the minor problems of life has been solved by the simple expedient of enclosing and leaving untouched a section of the whin bushes which make the natural decoration of the shore. A glory of gold in spring and early summer, these sturdy shrubs eliminate the difficulty presented by a garden which must, for months, lie neglected and, so soon as seen, presents to the would-be holiday-maker an unpleasantly urgent call to work. Whins stay till you come, and ask nothing of you whether you go or stay. But the pressmen, seeking for names of members of the Cabinet, had no eyes for this instructive parable. The film proprietors were more intelligent. They took a photograph of Mr MacDonald sitting in

golfing attire on the stoep of "The Hillocks" and flashed across to the London cinemas the portrait of a man who was making the "greatest revolution since Magna Charta." The public looked and accepted, hardly perturbed by the shrieks of the *Mail*. The pressmen returned South, not much wiser than they went. They "gathered" that Mr MacDonald was going to be his own Foreign Secretary. That was one big problem settled. As to the other, the great home problem of Unemployment, they "gathered" that Mr Sidney Webb, who had plans of every sort in books, pigeon-holes, Royal Commission Reports, was to have a chance to put them in operation. Beyond that, the canny Scot baffled them. Perhaps they guessed that every one wanted to be in the Cabinet, and was going to be hurt if his superlative qualifications were not adequately recognised; and so knew that there were thorns in Mr MacDonald's pillow sharper than grew on any whin bush. If he retained any illusions—and few do not—he was to lose them now.

The process of Cabinet-making went quietly on. It is common property now that Robert Smillie preferred to serve outside, and that certain others refused the posts proffered to them. But beyond that there has been practically no leakage. It is said that when the Cabinet



first met, most of its members were but recently aware of their own posts and ignorant of their colleagues. Their leader then, as later, kept his own secrets. Perhaps, then as later, he kept them too well. Between the Scylla of reserve and the Charybdis of openness the statesman can hardly hope to steer an uncriticised course. If Mr MacDonald chose silence—or rather if his temperament chose it for him—he chose the course of dignity. It had its price, this choice ; so has the alternative.

On his return to London, the decision to take on, confirmed already by the Labour Party Executive and General Council, was endorsed by the Party meeting. Did all who thus agreed comprehend what was involved, as to tactic and policy, in the decision ? A minority administration is hedged about with peculiar limitations : thoroughly seen, firmly grasped by Mr MacDonald. He knew what he was doing : he expected others to go through the rigorous process he had traversed, and to draw the appropriate conclusions. Whether or no, the decision was taken. It was made definite and public at a great mass meeting in the Albert Hall on 8th January. Mr MacDonald's speech at this meeting was for the first time reported verbatim. There is no speaker who gains so much by that process,

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who has so little to fear from it. He is always exposed to misinterpretation when his qualifying and expository clauses are omitted ; never wholly safe from it unless the reader has also heard him, since, being a natural speaker, he uses both voice and gesture as integral parts of his technique of persuasion. Thanks in part to this, he has a power, practically unique, of rousing and thrilling his audiences without travelling out of the practical into the miraculous. He can make the horizon inspiring without getting his head in its clouds.

In this speech he made his position and that of the Party perfectly clear : it was to take on in order to do national work. Work—that is the underlined word throughout. At the same time it was not to forget its distinctive message and appeal. He began by a reference to the pioneers who had made the whole adventure possible.

“ You and I, my friends, their successors, the heirs of their labour, must cherish with a religious zeal the inspiring memories they have left behind, and guard with all the care that tender human hearts can show the lamps that they lit before the altars of democracy and Socialism.”

Thus, in advance, he countered the argument that the Party, as a party, concerned only for party interests, would have done better to stay

out. That view he never held; he never accepted an antithesis between Socialist advance and national good. Socialism is national service: what promotes the one promotes the other. It would have injured, not furthered, the interests of the Party to shrink from responsibility, to refuse to render service.

In taking office there were risks. They were taken because "we are to shirk no responsibility that comes to us in the course of the evolution of our movement." There were risks; but also a call. They were a party of ideals.

"That is true, but we are not to jump there. We are going to walk there. We are upon a pilgrimage. We are on a journey. 'One step enough for me.' One step—yes, my friends, on one condition—that it leads to the next step."

They took office not, as was being said, to prepare for a General Election, but "in order to do work."

"We shall take office if we have the chance in order to try and settle the manifold and pressing difficulties that beset our nation, Europe, and the whole world at the present moment. My task, and my colleagues' task, is going to be to mobilise all men and women of goodwill and sane judgment.

"They tell me to look at figures. Well, I cannot help looking at figures, but I am much less interested in them than I am in work. They may have their

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hundreds and we may only have our fifties ; but fifty men and women doing things that appeal to the intelligence of our people are stronger than 5000 men and women doing things that make no such appeal. They can vote against us ; they can pursue their tactics. I do not care. Candidly and honestly, my friends and I are not thinking about it. We have in our minds, we have in our hearts, proposals, ideas, suggestions, which we believe will contribute to peace ; and we defy Liberals and Tories to range themselves against us in that work."

After reviewing in broad outline the immediate tasks before a Labour Government—peace in Europe, recognition of Russia, strengthening the League of Nations, the problems of unemployment, housing, etc., he closed with the following passage :—

"I want a Labour Government so that the life of the nation can be carried on ; 1924 is not the last year in God's programme of creation. We shall be dead and gone and forgotten, and generation after generation will come, and still the journey will be going on, still the search for the Holy Grail will be made by knights like Keir Hardie. The shield of love and the spear of justice will still be in the hands of good and upright men and women. And the ideal of a great future will still be in front of our people. I see no end, thank God, to these things. I see my own horizon, I see my own sky-line, but I am convinced that when my children and my children's children get there, there will be another sky-line, another horizon, another dawning, another glorious beckoning from Heaven itself. That is my faith, and in that faith I go on and my colleagues go on,

doing in their lifetime what they can to make their generation contribute something substantial to the well-being and happiness and holiness of human life."

The mood of dedication, the religious atmosphere brooding behind the whole speech, deeply impressed the great London audience. Instinctively they knew that here was no rhetoric, rather the release of what his own folk feel as the "real Mac." In the Albert Hall that evening it went straight home: reprinted next morning all over the world, across the seas to America and the Dominions, it gave the world assurance of a man, and laid the basis of the extraordinary general interest and belief in him that was to be the atmosphere of Labour's entry into office. Words occasionally have a truth to the ideas they shadow that gives them the force of actions: this speech was of that character. True, there were people who were not satisfied, future colleagues among them, but there always are people who are not satisfied. Something like a national confidence in and readiness for the new experiment was, however, established.

The transactions in the House of Commons, the formation of the Cabinet, its entry into office, its first administrative acts, solidified this. Mr Asquith's boast that Labour ruled by the good pleasure of the Liberals was taken, in and

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out of Parliament, at its real value. It heralded friction, in its insulting suggestion of control ; it did not imply anything more substantial. A minority government rules by national consent. Mr MacDonald made an appeal to private members in his opening speech as Prime Minister and further suggested that his Government's measures would be such as to achieve that consent.

The composition of the Cabinet reflected his sense of minority limitations and, with skill, met the very real problem of the House of Lords. Lord Haldane had long been a member of the Party and a personal friend : in Sir Sidney Olivier (raised to the peerage as Lord Olivier), one of the stalwarts of the early days of the Fabian Society rejoined his colleague Sidney Webb ; Lord Parmoor had, throughout the War, stood with Labour in its defence of freedom of conscience and shared its international aspirations ; Lord Chelmsford, while an outsider from the party point of view, was understood to have accepted the Admiralty only after a thorough understanding of the policy to be pursued, including the dropping of the Singapore project. The existence of peers, and the elevation of C. B. Thomson and Sydney Arnold on their appointments as Air Minister and Under-Secretary for the Colonies



respectively, worried some purists, but they had no effective solution of the constitutional problem of the Upper Chamber. Otherwise the selection and disposition of offices met with a chorus of approval, only broken by the mutterings of the excluded and by the doubt as to whether any shoulders, however Herculean, could bear the burden Mr MacDonald took upon himself in combining the offices of Premier and Foreign Secretary. His own first idea, one gathers, had not been to do so, but when a rumour got about as to the name he had in mind for Foreign Secretary—the name, as it was to prove, of the one man capable administratively of dealing with the office, whether or no possessed of the clarity of idea demanded—there was evidence, in the quarters most concerned for international peace, of a dislike, doubt, and suspicion that would have endangered the experiment from the start. None of those who criticised his own assumption of office at the time or since have ever been able to suggest an alternative, nor to meet the view that, since European peace was the first task of the Government, it was plainly proper that its head should undertake it.

So far as peace was concerned, the result justified the decision. Like other things worth getting, it had its price—a price paid, in the

main, by the man who sacrificed comfort, health, and strength to coping with it ; but the thing was done, the effort was crowned by success. Could anyone else have done it ? The form in which the criticisms are stated suggests the reply. For what do they amount to ? To a regret that he could not be everywhere, do everything at once. Parliamentary weakness—because he was not constantly enough on the Front Bench, though called in on every difficult occasion to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. Lack of directive and co-ordinating control—because he could not supply initiative to every department at once. Inaccessibility to colleagues, subordinates, and private members—because he was absorbed in and overwhelmed with work. All this, when inspected in detail, indicates that a part of the trouble was an intrinsic difficulty of making bricks without straw, of which the obverse side is an exaggerated tendency on the part of every one inside and outside the party to lean, depend on, watch, wait for, and consequently criticise the leader. After all, a leader should lead : he can hardly, reasonably, be expected to do everything. While inordinately suspicious of leadership the parliamentary party contains individuals who want, at one and the same time, to be told about everything and how to do every-



thing, and to lay down their own line and have it followed first in this and then in that.

To speak of the party is, however, not correct here. As a whole, the party, throughout all the stages of Labour government, showed patience and loyal understanding, a genuine and enthusiastic appreciation of what was done, and an intelligent recognition of the difficulties and limitations within which leaders had to operate. The rank and file appreciated facts and forces better, kept a surer grip both on ideals and on actualities, than did some of those in closer contact. The critics exist and existed as individuals, not in the mass. In their case dependence on leadership takes a form historically familiar to students of "advanced" and advancing parties. It is a nervous dependence, like that of a cat watching a mouse.

In a propaganda party each individual tends to act as a prophet within his own sphere, to feel himself competent to be Prime Minister on demand. Individualism is accentuated by the habit of public speaking, which covers a minimum of practical competence with a maximum of theoretic absolutism. The bulk of the material out of which Mr MacDonald had to form his government, as of that on which he had to rely for his support in the House of Commons, was,

inevitably, inexperienced in the translation of idea into action. Those who had to grapple practically with the task proved far more competent than the outsider had expected: at the same time they suffered, in numerous cases, from hesitancy and lack of initiative—and expected pathetically that he should supply their defects. Those defects were, of course, vividly seen by others not thus tested in action—the back-benchers. Their capacity for expression was unhampered by responsibility; they tended to separate members into sheep and goats according to their position on the Front Bench or behind it, and to attribute every weakness in the goats to the corrupting influence of office itself, and above all of MacDonald, the embodiment of office. In contact they found few signs of such corruption in him, but his withdrawal, limiting contact, allowed suspicion to flourish in the dark.

The addition of the routine of the heaviest office in the State to the work of Prime Minister had its serious evils. Sir Robert Peel, more than half a century ago, said that the task of a Prime Minister, who is expected to keep touch with and supervise the work of all departments, was becoming impossible. Modern complications have immensely increased the load. Mr MacDonald has the industry that amounts to genius: a

capacity for work that astounds subordinates ; but he could not, physically or mentally, be everywhere at once. He had, in deciding to be Foreign Secretary, to make a choice. He saw the drawbacks of the horn of the dilemma he selected ; he also saw the greater drawbacks of the alternative. The choice once made, these were forgotten by others. Perhaps he would have done well to remind them, but he has a dislike to pointing out facts obvious to himself and, by hypothesis, to intelligent beings. Throughout he assumes that some things can be taken for granted. Very few can : even then, they are the things that most people like best to hear. Intelligence rarely expresses itself in silence. The few occasions during his Premiership on which he felt moved to give voice to the obvious, have been the occasions on which he most completely dissipated the faint cloud that gathers round the head of the man exalted above his fellows. Such an occasion was his brief allocution to the Independent Labour Party Conference at York in April. There one could almost see the mist gathering itself together, lifting, and clearing away : the atmosphere warming : the affection that lay imprisoned coming up and rejoicing in the sun. It was there all the time, but needing the word of release. An excessive

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appreciation of the virtue of silence in those personal relations which remain an essential element in the actual tissue of politics, together with sheer pre-occupation, explain criticism, where criticism exists. In the mass of the rank and file, who do not expect to have their idiosyncrasies consulted, it does not and did not exist.

Psychological understanding is being recognised to-day as the foundation of successful business, at any rate on the other side of the Atlantic, where important transactions tend to be conducted in the revealing atmosphere of a good lunch, instead of in the chill of offices. Mr MacDonald's failure in the interpretation of individuals is due more to his deficient interest in looking, than to any incapacity to see, if he happens to look. Of national and group psychology he has a firm grip. His historical bent helps him to comprehend the British mind—that curious amalgam of contrary strains which, for some reason, has, again and again, submitted to the guidance of Scotsmen, in many respects apparently remote from it. He can—and did, with notable success, in his “outside” speeches—call out its unconscious poetry. In such addresses as those at Brighton, to the civil servants, or to various artistic and scientific groups, he helped to build for his hearers a wider

appreciation of Labour and Socialism than they had ever had; and the indirectness of his appeal was his secret. He understands our slow, almost unconscious method of procedure, the underground manner in which we, as a people, submit to change. Even in his lack of dramatic sense he is near to the heart of the mass of his countrymen. Anyhow, having no use for the effort to present the advent of Labour Government as a revolution, he rejoiced in the disappointment of the eager correspondents who came flocking over from America and elsewhere, to see the tumbrils or the guillotine, and found nothing more spectacular than a few plutocrats transferring their silver spoons to the banks while planning to invite the new Cabinet to dinner. He made some concessions to good sense: none to drama.

Lord Haldane, whose experience is varied enough, is said to have declared, after the first meeting of the Cabinet, that he had never been present at a more business-like assembly or sat under an equally efficient chairman. From the first, smoking was permitted—an innovation as startling as the prompt removal, so soon as Mr MacDonald moved into 10 Downing Street, of the barriers that had “guarded” it ever since the Irish scare of Mr Lloyd George’s regime.

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Moreover, the Foreign Office at once proceeded to translate his pledge into operation by the unconditional recognition of Russia. Intimation of this, the first public act of the new Government, was conveyed to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets at their session on February 2nd. This, however, was "real" politics. When asked for demonstrations of the newness of the new regime, for outward and visible signs that it was not to be as other governments, Mr MacDonald refused. His idea was that it should *be* better than other governments, not that it should *look* different from them. Here the great "Court" question comes in, and with it a problem of psychology of a kind open to various solutions.

Important intrinsically the question is not. A great deal of the throwing about of brains on it was sheer waste of time. One way or the other the matter was, plainly, secondary. The Constitution was there. The Court was part of it: a minority government had no power to alter it. Labour Ministers, like other Ministers, had to be sworn of the Privy Council and assume, in many cases, including Mr MacDonald's own, with genuine regret, the separating courtesy title of Right Honourable. Like other Ministers, they had to go to Buckingham Palace. Buckingham Palace received them with an impartial courtesy



warming, in many instances, to definite friendliness ; its good manners demanded at least equally good manners in return. So much is common ground. A question, however, does occur. While doing what good manners required, it was perhaps possible for a Labour Prime Minister to have confined such courtesy to the bare minimum of official attendance and, making a virtue of special circumstances, to have asked for the allowance of the Party's peculiar point of view in relation to ceremonial and the social hierarchy. There is a sincere dislike, throughout its ranks, of social display, the outward marks of rank and wealth ; a sincere desire to eliminate, progressively, the artificiality of existing class distinctions. If Sunday paper opinion was pleased by seeing Labour Ministers and their wives "as good as other people," a more intelligent stratum of opinion inside and outside would have been pleased by the courage of a firm, yet polite, stand on social simplicity : would have liked and appreciated a difference of that sort. Knowing, as it does, how precious are the social loaves and fishes to the weaker brethren everywhere, it would have valued, understood, perhaps exaggerated the importance of their conscientious refusal. Moreover, among the middle and professional classes, such a line might have had a quiet but deep

effectiveness. The question is difficult. Only a very clear lead, probably, could have carried the consent of the persons involved. The line of least resistance, was, obviously, to do what was normally done. But at the time and since one may feel that a chance—not intrinsically important, but of a certain symbolic value—was missed which can hardly recur.

Mr MacDonald's own attitude is that of a man too concerned about big things to bother much about little ones : occupied with realities, little concerned with shows ; perhaps a trifle oblivious of the value which a slow-moving imagination continues to attach to symbols. For him, this social business came in the day's work and was taken as part of it. When his attention was called by an interviewer to the question of levee dress, he remarked :

“ I hear and see that some people are interested in these vanities. I should have forgotten I had a ceremonial suit if I didn't see it in the Press. What a silly thing it all is. I have known people who showed vanity by the clumsiness of their clothes. A tattered hat and a red tie, a tone of voice and religious repetition of Marxian phrases, may be as indicative of a man who has sold himself to appearances as the possession of a ceremonial dress to enable him to attend ceremonies which are historical parts of his duties. Perhaps it is some defect in me, but I regard those who make these criticisms, by reason of the emphasis they lay upon



the matter, as being farther away from the qualities of self-mastery and single-minded devotion to the cause of Labour than those who, when occasion requires it, put on a ceremonial suit without thinking of it and put it away without troubling about it.”<sup>1</sup>

Did not Lenin tell his ambassador in Berlin in 1918, perturbed about the garments expected at Hohenzollern functions, to “put on a petticoat if it will help to get peace”? Certainly, it must have been disappointing to find, in many quarters, both at the time and long after, more talk about this question than about the work the new Government was doing: to find party criticism as unintelligently addressed to and concentrated upon it, as was hostile criticism upon the strikes which actually coincided with the Government’s advent to power, although, as every one who follows industrial conditions knows, they had nothing to do with it.

So far as No. 10 Downing Street was concerned, the most censorious can have found little to cavil at. Outside the luncheons necessary from time to time, and two or three Cabinet dinners, entertaining there was of the most modest dimensions, and no visitor, however simple, need have been troubled by the clothes question. The Prime Minister’s eldest daughter filled the

<sup>1</sup> *New Leader*, 18th April 1924.

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rôle of hostess with simple dignity : his younger daughters went to school in the same plain frocks and hats they wore in Hampstead. Of change there was no sign. In his personal habits their father remained simple as before, and in his approach to people, of all sorts and conditions, unaffected. Old friends did not find him either altered or inaccessible. The first "party" he gave at No. 10 was an informal homely assemblage of old friends—men and women who, in the years gone by, used to gather at 3 Lincoln's Inn Fields to enjoy the unpretentious hospitality that he and Mrs MacDonald dispensed there, and had since given, from time to time, a loving eye to his motherless children. With them were people who had stood with him during the dark years of the War, when fashionable London closed its doors and halls in provincial towns were refused for his meetings. There were no stars or ribbons ; it was not a "dress" occasion. These folk found no alteration in the frank friendliness of his manner ; he had time to talk to them, to remember old times ; to laugh with them over the drama in which he was playing lead. A second party, on a Saturday morning in April, arose out of the presence in London of the Glasgow Orpheus Choir, who came to Downing Street to sing to the Prime Minister and some distinguished and

undistinguished Scots in London. The Duke and Duchess of York were there, and made the choristers proud and happy by shaking hands all round, after their wonderful performance was over; but it was the most informal of occasions. "Scots Wha Hae" produced a severe crack in the floor of No. 10—which may or may not have had a symbolic meaning; but the crack has been repaired, and the Glaswegians, after discoursing that and other national airs, departed happy; their guest at so many happy supper parties after concerts at Queen's Hall, the Border towns, and the St Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, was "the same old Mac."

If Mr MacDonald, to-day, to all appearance now finds it easy to revert to his old habits, his old working coat, his old rather crowded study, his frugal lunch at the 1917 Club, his energetic habit of walking rather than riding (in this one point, indeed, he now has an advantage over his more splendid self), it is because the mind behind those habits was unaffected by public importance. He could "put on a ceremonial suit without thinking about it and put it away without troubling about it." Then, as now, his concern was with other things. Then, as now, he was unable to understand the excitement generated by the clothes question. Everything

interests him ; notably so habits, customs, ceremonies, even clothes, which enshrine historic tradition or speak, simply, to the æsthetic sense ; few excite him. " A pageant," so he put it at Dundee (9th September 1924), " is only justified when it expresses the soul and life, the sense of colour and beauty and romance, of the nation." Within these limits, he accepts pageantry. But he refused to get excited about it, one way or the other. I remember seeing him innocently—or largely innocently—reduce an unfortunate and serious-minded individual to something like fury, while he expatiated on the superior beauty of knee breeches and silk stockings, above all if white. When he realised that he was revealing to his interlocutor a degree of moral depravity which deprived the latter of any power of expression, save facial, he mischievously piled on the agony by describing to him the loveliness of the ensemble of a State Ball. The said interlocutor, not being blessed with his peculiar sense of humour, went away convinced that Labour government was a whited sepulchre : evidence that the nation regarded it as a business government of high efficiency only exasperated his inflamed nerves.

## CHAPTER III

### IDEA IN ACTION

“It is that terrible problem of blending the ideal with the real which presses upon all of us who want to change the mind and the system of Europe.”—Geneva, 4th Sept. 1924.

RAMSAY MACDONALD as Foreign Secretary. Ten years ago, even two years ago, the idea would have made patriots turn green. Yet, in January 1924, the incredible happened. At a surprisingly early hour in the morning, the pacifist quietly took possession, and, without any fuss or preliminaries, settled down to work.

A minor revolution, it is true, did take place. The new Foreign Secretary told the departmental chief, standing, according to custom, at his table, to sit down; later in the day made another civil servant take a seat beside him to study a map. In the same way, he asked to be shown all over the building; took it for granted that the entire staff, from secretaries to messengers, were co-operators in a common task, and, from start to finish, treated them on that footing.

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It was quite simply done ; the change can only be appreciated by those who know the Foreign Office.

Stories that he was run by his staff soon died of inaccuracy ; stories of their devotion, being true, will live on. On details of administration he was quick to learn, and very soon had a grip on the machine ; on principles of policy, his mind was in control from the first. There have been hard workers at the Foreign Office before, and powerful minds : what was speedily felt as differentiating this new chief was an idea. For some time, indeed, this was better realised inside than out. Mr MacDonald conceives of ideas in relation to action rather than expression. He wanted to apply pacifism, not to enunciate it. Manifestoes did not issue from the Foreign Office, whether in Notes or in any other form ; there were no preliminary statements of what he was going to do. Above all, no prophecies.

“ I am one of those people who like to get on with work and not to waste time in prophecy. I am a very bad prophet. I try to do my best to get the day's work done day by day, knowing perfectly well that *if one works on a scheme of thought*, work done by that is like laying tier upon tier of a great building, the end of which you will never see, but the completed form of which, nevertheless, enlivens your heart.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Manchester, 15th October 1924.



Talk about a thing before it is done too often means that the talk is all there is of it. The constructive mind builds its idea into the texture of fact. At the same time, it is often useful to detach the idea from the achievement that partly expresses it. Certainly, in the case of Mr MacDonald's foreign policy, it is worth while doing so, because while his success is directly related to that idea, and significant in its light, he himself has laid more stress on its limiting conditions. Thus, writing in the *Spectator* (December 6, 1924) he said :

“ Even in making the changes which difference in party outlook implies, it is well that statesmen should have some rules to remind them that he who can transform things without violence and sharp breaks is possessed of a higher degree of greatness, and is more likely to do good that will last, than he who demands for his work a clean slate and can write nothing in history except what begins a new volume or at least a new chapter. The crudest form of diplomacy is that of revolutionary forcefulness, scrapped Treaties, the clean slate.”

His insistence on a limited objective, and his emphasis on gradual transformation as against the sharp break, were the instruments of achievement ; but the instruments would have been unavailing without the guiding idea.

The restoration of the old diplomacy may undo

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what he did ; it cannot wipe out of the records of history the fact that idealism has been proved a practical method when applied by a sincere and intelligent idealist who knew what he is about. From this point of view his nine months' Foreign Secretaryship makes a real notch in international politics, may be even more important for the future than for the past. The things he did were big, but the how and why of them is what matters most.

Pacifism, to a mind like his, is no isolated creed. There are men and women who hate war passionately and yet, at its onset, collapse into a fatalistic acceptance of an inevitable evil : others, with a darker pessimism, see no alternative method of producing necessary change. Such people are against war in general but not against "this war." Their negativism can find no moral foothold. Mr MacDonald's pacifism is an aspect, and an essential aspect, of his Socialism. It is an "advanced" opinion, because, as Mr Ponsonby put it the other day, advanced opinions are those which look to the future ; represent now the outlook towards which humanity is moving, must move, if it is to live. Not competition but co-operation is the law of life between nations as between individuals. Theoretically that is admitted by almost all. It is an accepted common-



place that the power to act together for a common good is what distinguishes man from other animal forms and has enabled him to achieve mastery over natural forces, and that this is a condition of the satisfaction of his primary instincts, which otherwise will destroy the minds they move. But by many this commonplace is merely accepted. No lesson is drawn from it. Not so by the Socialist. Fundamental in Socialism is the belief that it is necessary and possible to make explicit the co-operation implicit in every fruitful human enterprise : to organise it as a scientific method, and so achieve an increase both in the return to effort and in the happiness of those who put that effort out. This principle is valid of international as of national relations.

Mr MacDonald from the earliest days of the War refused to be content with exposing its causes or denouncing its sufferings ; he insisted on looking forward to the settlement which must, if it had any claim to that name, be a political and not a military settlement. His pacifism from first to last was positive and constructive. The security for which the peoples imagined themselves to be fighting could only be achieved through co-operation and goodwill : however interrupted, those forces alone could build anything permanent. “ The spirit of goodwill makes the security

it seeks." Trust in any other method was illusory and self-defeating. This view of his was no amiable theory: derived in the first instance from scientific study, it had been fortified at every point by direct political and industrial experience and a first-hand and exact knowledge of actual conditions in Europe. So lately as October 1923, he paid an extensive visit to the Continent, and returned more than ever convinced that the one asset Great Britain possessed was the still lingering belief in our disinterested justice. Thanks to bad, incompetent, and disingenuous stewardship, this was a wasting asset—our prestige at the time stood nearly at zero; its restoration, however, was the one hope for ourselves and for Europe. Force, or the show of it, as an instrument for that was worse than useless. Bluff had brought deserved contempt upon those who used it. It was time to try a new method. The condition of its success was sincerity.

"My first task was to create a healthier atmosphere; I had to make a gesture and wait to see if it was responded to. It is these psychological things that are far more important than beastly clever dispatches, however politely handed by ambassadors to ministers, which are, nevertheless, thrown like bricks at their head. Our diplomacy must be perfectly straight and absolutely frank. It must be perfectly straight; it must be absolutely frank and quite considerate, only asking for

a similar response on the part of the other side. France has nothing to fear from any policy that we may pursue. We may not be able to agree with everything that she does. We do not expect her to follow our desires. But nothing ought to arise between us, and I am sure nothing will arise between us, but what goodwill and honest dealing can settle. We must consider such problems as Reparations and the Ruhr from the point of view of France, Great Britain, and Europe, and do everything to find a satisfactory agreement. Above all, and this is very essential, we must both remember that time is running a very tragic race against us.”<sup>1</sup>

The idealist in politics is constantly jeered at, and not least by those who would indignantly repudiate the notion that they are materialists. The scorn dealt out to him has a curious accent, since what apparently differentiates him is not so much his professed belief in ideas as his declared intention of putting them into practice. Politicians of every party everywhere pay lip-service to ideas: the difference lies in the degree in which they believe what they say, and trust to their expressed ideas at the test of action. The so-called “failures of the idealist” are, in nine cases out of ten, to be referred to his own incomplete trust in and grasp of the principles he has expressed. He fails, that is to say, in proportion not to the ardency, but to the weakness of his idealism. Imperfectly con-

<sup>1</sup> House of Commons, 12th February 1924.

vinced himself, or imperfectly seized of the shape, structure, and implications of his own idea, he admits into his mind discordant principles and is destroyed by the mixture. Ignorance, impatience, or insincerity (often a form of ignorance) bring him down, and idealism is, wrongly, discredited.

Of hypocritical lip-service to idealism and its ignominious collapse, our recent experience affords numberless painful examples; of the disservice ignorance can do to it, not a few. Mr MacDonald at the Foreign Office is the one big outstanding instance where it has been genuinely and consistently applied. Just as there was nothing vague in his ideas, so there was nothing slipshod in his methods. Idealists are supposed to be in a hurry, though history is a monument to their patience. He certainly is never in a hurry. His patience is a compound of Scottish caution and inflexible grip; once he has taken hold of a thing he never lets go. Difficulty, opposition, apparent defeat, strengthen, not relax, a determination which at times seems to others no better than a mulish obstinacy, so impossible is it to break down. The severe realism with which he laid the bases for his "Peace offensive" last summer vexed and disquieted less patient supporters. There were grumbles because it took the Labour Government eight days—from 23rd

January to 1st February—to recognise Russia ; grumbles because this was not at once followed by a loud denunciation of the Ruhr occupation ; and so on. The grumblers saw a Labour Foreign Minister coming in one day, putting the trumpet to his lips and blowing the next. There they stopped. Not so Mr MacDonald. He was to *do* something. Action required preparation. It got it. Denunciatory eloquence might give satisfaction to those who uttered it—it could only jam more firmly the locked door of peace, to which the key was an understanding with France.

France was an awkward fact for the impatient. They chose to forget it, now and later, and to ignore the likelihood that their diatribes might rebound with fatal effect upon Germany, whom amiable words could do nothing to assist. Mr MacDonald did not. He settled down to patient work—work in which his idealism and his realism never lost touch of one another. He saw that expressions of sympathy with Germany, however heartfelt, cut no ice. They could, at best, merely exasperate French opinion, on whose gradual return to sanity, gradual appreciation of hard facts, peace depended. Threats, such as Lord Curzon had indulged in, were even more foolish. Great Britain was not going to war. Its weapons were of another character.

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“First of all, I want to establish peace. Sometimes you read that I am not interested in security. What frightful nonsense it is. It is the thing I am most interested in. I want you to feel perfectly secure that no son of yours, no grandson of yours, will ever be asked to go through what I see by your badges many of you have gone through. I cannot do that by merely talking peace, by merely preaching peace. I cannot do that by merely arguing in favour of peace and against war. Therefore, with this in my heart as it is, I can only do it by creating such a condition of affairs in Europe that it will be quite unnecessary in times to come for any nation to bring the bugle to its lips. Peace? I cannot get peace unless I also get this. I want friendship. We can sign a document together, you and I, a document of partnership, but if there is no friendship that provides the ink with which that document is written, the document is limited in its effect. As the years go, the ink will fade, until one day you will find that nothing has been written at all. The agreement is broken. The two parties that signed it are at enmity. How are you going to provide against that?

“I see that some of my friends talk against sentimentality and spirituality and all that sort of thing. The one thing that matters in this life is the spirit. If you do not lay the foundations of your house from bricks made from the spirit, great will be the destruction of that house of yours. The thing we have not yet discovered, the thing we are too cowardly to face, is this very simple thing that there is more security to be found by a policy that creates friendship, active, vital friendship, than in a policy that is wise and austere and is written down: ‘Whereas 1, 2, 3, therefore, and so on.’ That thing does not last, and the other thing does, and the great contribution that a Labour Government—



more particularly a British Labour Government—can make to the security of the world, to the peace of the world, is to begin first of all not with grand programmes, but to establish a condition of friendly relations.”<sup>1</sup>

“Really it was all very simple,” he has subsequently explained. “Instead of threatening or trying to circumvent, I merely put my cards on the table.” Those cards were a frank, genuine, convinced and convincing goodwill. Not Singapore, not increased Estimates, not angry Notes, not the threats of force, “in the last resort,” which transfer control from Foreign Office to War Office, but a disinterested readiness to co-operate to the common advantage—and a complete reliance, without *arrière pensée* of any kind, on that. Other people had said before that public opinion was the dominating force, but they acted as if the cannon was; Mr MacDonald believed in opinion and acted upon it. He did this both in relation to France and in relation to Russia. His success was no accident. He had a plan, a scheme of thought, and applied it. Therefore, he could use circumstances, like the Experts’ Report.

When he took on he had most things against him. Lord Curzon had worsened relations with Russia and the Near East. Mr Baldwin had worsened a relation to France which Mr Bonar

<sup>1</sup> Briton Ferry, 24th April 1924.

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Law had left in evil enough case ; elections were looming in both Germany (April) and France (May), and the outlook was gloomy, for in either case, reaction was expected to triumph. M. Poincaré, who had held his ground against Mr Lloyd George, Mr Bonar Law, and Mr Baldwin, seemed to dominate Europe.

Mr MacDonald settled down to the task of creating a new atmosphere. In February a first, in March a second interchange of letters with M. Poincaré was published.

After paving the way, on 26th January, he proceeded on 25th February to set out "without reserve," for M. Poincaré's edification, "certain difficulties with which I am faced." The economic existence of Great Britain had been "gravely endangered," with the result that

"the people in this country regard with anxiety what appears to them to be the determination of France to ruin Germany and to dominate the Continent without consideration of our reasonable interests and future consequences to European settlement ; that they feel apprehensive of the large military and aerial establishment maintained not only in Eastern but also in Western France ; that they are disturbed by the interest shown by your Government in the military organisation of the new States in Central Europe ; and, finally, that they question why all these activities should be financed by the French Government in disregard of the fact that the British taxpayer has to find upwards of thirty million



pounds a year as interest upon loans raised in America, and that our taxpayers have also to find large sums to pay interest on the debt of France to us to meet which France herself has as yet neither made nor propounded, so far as they can see, any sacrifice equivalent to their own."

On fundamental aims the differences between France and Great Britain were not wide. Both desired security. But whereas France "conceives of security as security against Germany alone," "what we desire is security against war." An agreement on fundamental aims would clear many subsidiary problems out of the way, which, if considered in isolation, perpetuated misunderstanding.

"It is on such a basis that I should wish to discuss with you our outstanding problems. If we can achieve agreement on the main principles which inspire us, and if these principles can be explained to our respective peoples and to the public opinion of the world, then I have little doubt that the many subsidiary problems, intricate and thorny though they have become, will not prove impossible of solution. If, on the other hand, we allow ourselves to be entangled in the mass of detail which has arisen around such situations and problems as the Ruhr, the Rhineland, and the Palatinate, then our ultimate objectives will again become obscured, and we shall relapse into the old wearisome round of controversy and altercation on points that may be important but are not fundamental."

In these letters some very straight things were said, in terms whose firmness was as definite as

their politeness. Yet, French opinion, so easily stung, remained calm ; more than that, it became attentive. This was not the mailed fist in the velvet glove ; a hand was held out whose warmth was as open as its firm and tenacious grip. It might be safe to take it ; it might even be worth while to take it.

So it was felt in France. What are letters ? said some people in England. This was a new Entente ; is that all ? They became still gloomier when the German elections produced a Right Government. Mr MacDonald apparently did not worry : he had, in fact, discounted a result which was the inevitable price of the long game he was playing. He received the temporary resignation of M. Poincaré on 26th March, on a domestic issue, with the same phlegm : apparently M. Poincaré's movements did not interest him. The question was, Did he represent France ? It was with France as it was, not as it might or ought to be, that he had to deal. To win French confidence was the way to help Germany ; if in the process German opinion was temporarily damped, that could not be helped. And he was winning French confidence. Two things gradually became plain to the average Frenchman. First, the new English Government was not there to do him in ; it could be trusted to play fair : second, the Ruhr

adventure policy was not paying. Prices were going up, the franc was coming down.

Mr MacDonald knew what he was doing, and he believes in doing one thing at a time. By 9th April, when the Experts' Committee reported, his "atmosphere" was ready. Within three days of its issue the British Government took the lead: it declared its acceptance of the Report as a whole, and invited the co-operation of other Governments in a definite, specific, and limited task—the putting of the Report into operation. Speaking at York on Easter Saturday, Mr MacDonald emphasised the importance of the opportunity for co-operative action the Report gave, and deprecated threats to a possibly defaulting Germany. Meantime, President Coolidge's Washington speech gave a valuable earnest of American co-operation. Italy (thanks to the fact that he had settled the Jubaland question to its satisfaction) accepted the Report: Belgium, after M. Theunis had surmounted a crisis, did the same. On 4th May, at Mr MacDonald's suggestion, M. Theunis paid a visit to Chequers before talking with Paris. Paris was quibbling about the Report, but, though correspondence was going on which, when published later, showed M. Poincaré being drawn by insensible stages towards acceptance, Mr MacDonald was not worrying too much about Paris.

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He had plenty of other things to worry about, including the Russian Conference, which he had opened on 14th April with a very realist speech.

May 31st brought the French elections. Perhaps as a re-insurance policy Mr MacDonald, before the polls, bade M. Poincaré to Chequers. M. Poincaré never came. It would probably have given Mr MacDonald peculiar pleasure to have dealt with him. He had, however, done his work too well for that. French observers of every shade of opinion agree in attributing to the British Labour Government, and, above all, to belief in its good faith, a capital share in the collapse of the Bloc National and the replacement of M. Poincaré by M. Herriot—Liberal, generous, imaginative, but by no means a free agent. On the contrary he was committed, as he very soon showed, to the characteristic French view of security, the sanctity of the Treaty of Versailles, etc.

Nevertheless, the first round was won. The atmosphere was growing: the new spirit was doing its work. Evidence of that came from all parts of the world. Europe was, hopefully, sitting up and taking notice. At the end of June, M. Herriot came to Chequers: on 16th July representatives of all the allied nations met in London.

The object of the Conference was limited and specific—Mr MacDonald insisted on that. It was to devise concrete means for putting the Experts' Report into operation. It was distinguished from the start by an atmosphere wholly different from that of the innumerable conferences of Mr Lloyd George's regime—the MacDonald atmosphere of business-like goodwill.

After numerous temporary contretemps—one between Mr Snowden and the Bankers, another apropos of the publication (19th July) of Mr MacDonald's letter to the League of Nations rejecting the draft Treaty of mutual assistance—agreement was reached. On 5th August the German delegates arrived, and with them came the real crux. The new spirit was to be put to a severe, all-round test. The Experts' Report assumed but did not refer to the evacuation of the Ruhr. The Germans had come to secure a definite evacuation date. On this a breakdown seemed imminent. At the week-end, M. Herriot dashed over to Paris, resignations were talked of from this delegation and that, Labour Members of Parliament were suddenly moved to forth-right denunciations of the whole principle of the Experts' Report. All Mr MacDonald's realism, all his idealism were required: when the House of Commons rose for the recess it was a general

impression that the Conference, like its numerous predecessors, would end in smoke.

Whoever contemplated failure, the Premier did not. As usual, it called up his resources. A little story reported by the *Daily News* puts in a sentence a good deal about him. In June, while M. Herriot was settling, not too comfortably, into the saddle, Mr MacDonald went home to Lossiemouth for a few days. There he played golf with Lord Thomson, the Air Minister. Not on the Morayshire Golf Links—its Committee remained obdurate—but at Spey Bay, which, in January, had seized the chance to make him a member.

“At the thirteenth hole Lord Thomson and his partner became four holes up and five to play. Something had to be done, so the Premier took off his coat, and at the fourteenth tee hit the finest drive of the match.”

“Something had to be done, so the Premier took off his coat.” When something has to be done he always will take off his coat, and, very often, “hit the finest ball of the match.” In Conferences, in the House of Commons, this has happened again and again. Some men like to take off their coat at the beginning; it is a fine gesture, fuller of promise often than performance. Mr MacDonald keeps his on, till the moment comes. Then, whether at golf or something more



important, he brings up reserves, held, not to frighten the opponent, but to do work. Not that the distinction between golf and something more important is one that he would accept. When you are playing golf there is nothing more important.

In the first week of August "something had to be done." Failure would have spelt disaster, in Europe, for peace. He was not going to have it. His informal, apparently easy-going methods had so warmed the chilly atmosphere in which Germans and French had met that, by now, no one in the meetings was thinking any longer on those lines. A final effort brought achievement. On Saturday, 16th August, the London Settlement was signed. It incorporated an agreed method for putting the Dawes plan into operation immediately: annexed thereto was an undertaking for the evacuation of the Ruhr, to begin forthwith and be completed not later than twelve months hence. Mr MacDonald, presiding at the closing meeting, began by an expression of gratitude to "the colleagues from Premiers to typists" who had worked to make the Conference a success. Has a Premier ever before remembered the typists? He went on with a gentle reminder of some of the obligations and implications of an agreement. "Some of us would like to see

different provisions here and there, but we offer to our countries the agreement as a whole, and those who fix on this detail or on that with a frown or a shake of the head must remember what alternative faced us. . . .”

“I believe that we have given Europe something better than an agreement drafted by lawyers and printed on paper—we all negotiated, discussed, put ourselves in each other’s shoes. That is the greatest advance we have made. We are now offering the first really negotiated agreement since the War ; every party here represented is morally bound to do its best to carry it out, because it is not the result of an ultimatum ; we have tried to meet each other as far as the public opinion of the various countries would allow us. . . . This agreement may be regarded as the first Peace Treaty, because we sign it with a feeling that we have turned our backs on the terrible years of war and war mentality.”

For Germany, the heavy burdens on whose people he recognised in a feeling sentence, the great advantage secured was the creation of a system of “arbitration, of examination, of revision” which would enable mistakes to be discovered and rectified.

“In other words, the time of national isolation is ended, and that of exchange of views and of reasonable dealing with experience has begun. . . . Our work is only beginning. If it restores some confidence and hope, so that we may face the future with calmer minds and with more of the spirit of co-operation, it will lead to



far greater solutions than the document that bears our signatures itself contains. We must go on, step by step, with our work of peacemaking and of restoration."

On the importance of Mr MacDonald's personal contribution as President, all the subsequent speakers (MM. Herriot, Theunis, and Stefani, Mr Kellogg and Chancellor Marx) laid stress. "The greatest part of this result is due to him."

Throughout Europe and America the signal significance of the achievement was recognised, and its special quality. At the same time rocks, kept submerged under the full tide of Conference anxiety, began almost at once to appear. The meaning and need of Mr MacDonald's reminder of the sacrifices that must, in the nature of things, be made by each party to an agreed settlement, the concessions that are inevitable when people of different views negotiate on an equality, were demonstrated almost before the ink on the protocol was dry.

The firm yet courteous letter, published in the press of 19th August, in which he reminded M. Herriot that in the view of the British Government the Ruhr occupation was illegal, did not prevent criticism inside his own party, which, however just in theory, conveniently left French opinion out, and also the obligations inherited by the Government. He had later to remind

the miners of these. True, Labour at the time and since had denounced the Versailles Treaty and foreshadowed its evil consequences for Europe and ourselves. But, as he was to say at Bristol on 21st October, to tear up Treaties, to disregard responsibility, could only be done

“with the result that the faith of England is damaged, the word of England is damaged, the name of England is cheapened. If you make a bargain, carry it out. Carry it out unless you can get the other party to the bargain to agree with you to modify it. No man and no nation who has put his or its name to a bargain has got any right at a given moment, when he finds he has made a bad bargain, to turn round and say, ‘I am going to play no more: I am not going to have that any more.’

“Another thing you can do, however. You can say to those who came to the bargain with you that experience has shown that it was a bad bargain and the time has come to modify it. That is what I did. I have torn nothing up. I have not done what I should like. No. No man short of God ever does. But we have created a new type of machine, by which experience is going to be related to expectation, and expectation to experience, and if we find, day by day and week by week and month by month, that things are going wrong, in accordance with the London Agreement we have got a machine which enables us to adjust the original machine by arbitration and agreement, so that errors will be gradually and steadily removed, and at last we shall get to a normal and natural level.”

In this part of his work Mr MacDonald could certainly claim that he had national support.

His position was strikingly different in relation to another integral aspect of his peace effort—the establishment of an understanding with Russia. Obvious as it was and is that European peace must be unstable, that reconstruction cannot proceed, that world trade cannot revive until the “natural and normal level” is restored between ourselves and Russia, this truism remains hidden behind clouds of prejudice. Even in 1924, nine people out of ten saw Russia as a moral rather than as an economic proposition; insisted on regarding a vast country with a population of 150 millions mainly as a “cautionary tale”; thought in terms not of peace, still less of economics, but of Bolshevism. The movement towards rationality which had taken place in relation to Germany, has not yet been accomplished in relation to Russia. It is beginning, however; and the frustrated work of the Labour Government, which ultimately cost it its life, has powerfully accelerated it.

In 1922 Mr Keynes suggested that “private” opinion had become rational in relation to Germany, reparations, etc. By 1924 “public” opinion had followed it, as the success of the German loan in October 1924 and the Anglo-German Commercial Treaty proved. (This Treaty was actually implemented by Mr MacDonald, though

not announced till after he had gone out of office.) If further proof were required it might be found in the abject failure of the effort, made by Lord Birkenhead and supported by the *Mail*, to make election capital out of Mr MacDonald's war record, or of calling him a "pro-German." Russia, however, was and is quite another matter. In 1924 private opinion about Russia was still a long way ahead of public opinion. The *de jure* recognition of the Russian Government created something of a storm; the Bolshevik bogey continually looked out in the cartoons and lampoons which diversified the newspapers; the proceedings of the Anglo-Russian Conferences were, throughout, reported in a tone of hostility. Russia was made a "party" issue from the first.

The difficulties were not lessened by the enthusiastic partisanship of his own parliamentary supporters. They regarded the establishment of good relations with France with tepid interest; a Russian Treaty thrilled them. To some extent their feeling was a reaction from the hostility of the Oppositions. Certainly it did not, in most cases, arise from any sympathy with Bolshevism. As a creed with any possible application to Britain, it had been rejected by the Party again and again. Mr MacDonald's denunciation of it, which had, since 1920, carried the Party with him, had earned

him the heartwhole hatred of the Third International. Its diatribes had pursued him ever since ; he had been put on its Index ; they grew in intensity and venom with his efforts, as Foreign Secretary, to make Treaties. Its dislike he frankly reciprocated ; but it did not deflect him from the task of bringing Russia back into the European family. There was, after all, more in Russia than the Third International ; more, too, than Bolshevism. Of Bolshevism indeed there was, it was believed, not much left in Russia by 1924, or at any time after Lenin's famous " reversion " in 1921. Members of the Labour Party remembered, if Tories did not, that Lenin had declared that there were only three Communists in Russia : " Ulianov, Lenin, and myself." There were, they knew, evils in Russia ; but those evils were the products of separation, or traces of past error. The civil war fomented by Mr Churchill and Mr Lloyd George, the blockade, the continued isolation of Russia, were, it was felt, important contributory causes to anything that was evil in the actual Russian regime ; peace, unfettered intercourse, the contacts that trade would bring, would modify it. There is said to be more joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just men. Labour's attitude to Russia was tinged with this generous romanti-

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cism ; the special warmth in this feeling was fed by the abuse hurled at this Prodigal Son in the European family. Ever since 1917 "Russia" had been a word to evoke cheers from Labour audiences—as in the years up to 1914 and between 1914–17 it had evoked groans. No one on either side could or would argue calmly about Russia.

Mr MacDonald, however, believing in peace and believing in his instrument—goodwill—applied it to Russia as to France. The two efforts were correlated parts of one and the same policy. With Russia, as with France, the ground had to be cleared. To do so was the object of the Conference. The great obstacle was, of course, the question of debts. The Bankers' Memorandum had produced stormy waters : at the end of May a complete deadlock seemed to have been reached. In the middle of June there was a more hopeful meeting between M. Rakovsky and the bondholders. Russians are never in a hurry : their delegation apparently did not mind how long things dallied : the priests of the Third International kept things lively by denouncing the MacDonald Government and all its ways and works : rumours flew about to the effect that "Russia" did not want a Treaty. But Mr Ponsonby, in charge of the Conference, was not prepared to spend the rest of his official life on



preliminaries, however ticklish. The important thing was to reach such a measure of agreement about the legacies of the past as would enable Britain and Russia, in the future, to work and trade for mutual advantage.

By 4th August differences had been narrowed down. Although after a twenty-hours' sitting the Conference broke up without agreement, and a "failure" communique was actually issued, it was possible, within another twenty-four hours, to bring its members together again, and, thanks to the discovery of a formula, to clear away the last obstructions. They had, after the grim fatigue of so long a session, seemed more formidable than they were. The much-advertised interposition of "back-benchers" amounted to no more than a timely assistance to a renewal of touch that would anyhow have been accomplished. Pressure they certainly did not exercise. None was needed, at the British end. Mr Ponsonby throughout had a stronger position than M. Rakovsky, inasmuch as he knew the British Cabinet was wholeheartedly for peace, whereas M. Rakovsky's delegation represented elements in Russia not too anxious for co-operation with governments. Mr Ponsonby was able, therefore, to report to the Prime Minister, at midday of 6th August, that agreement was reached on a formula which by



then had been “passed” by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. His difficulty in the House of Commons at night was that the Treaties, incorporating that agreement, had not yet emerged in printed form from the draftsman’s hands. He could, however, report to the House that agreement had been reached and two Treaties were ready for signature. They regularised relations ; they gave us most favoured nation treatment, and admitted Russia to the exports credit scheme ; they settled the fishery question to our advantage ; they incorporated a recognition of liability by the Russian Government, and a suspension of its confiscation decrees for the advantage of our nationals. To these things, however, little attention was paid by the excited audience of Tories and Liberals. What they fastened on was the arrangement in Article 6 for a future joint commission to investigate and decide about property claims and compensation, and incorporate its agreement in a separate future Treaty, with its contingent proposal, to be submitted to Parliament, guaranteeing interest and sinking fund of a loan, if and when the Russian Government could raise such on the market. This contingent loan made them see red ; from that day to 30th October they saw in the Russian Treaties nothing but the loan, which was not in them.

Mr MacDonald was twitted at the time, and constantly, because in June he had declared that we would not make a loan to Russia. Useless, apparently, to point out that it was one thing to undertake to give a loan for unspecified purposes, and quite another to agree to guarantee the interest and sinking fund of a loan which Russia could raise in the City, and would—as was definitely promised by M. Rakovsky, and later by M. Joffe and M. Tchicherine— earmark for productive purchases, largely in this country: the whole transaction to be subject to Treasury approval and sanction.

“ If I said a thing in June which I found by August was wrong, I certainly would change my mind. But that was not quite the situation,”

he explained at Manchester (15th October). Not only had the character of the guarantee entirely changed, the purpose of the loan had been determined. It was not to be used for military expenditure: it was to be spent, to a large extent, in this country. Moreover, the entire proposition was to depend on Treasury approval and Parliamentary sanction:

“ Nothing should be definitely fixed until the British House of Commons itself had accepted the sum, had accepted the conditions, had accepted the guarantee offered by the Russian Government.”

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“Russia is there,” he reminded his critics. It is a fact they would not face. Like it or dislike it (and in many respects he disliked it extremely), it happens to exist. From that point of view his opinions and feelings about Bolsheviks were irrelevant. He sought peace with them not because he loved or agreed with them, but because peace is a common-sense and practical thing, quarrelling and denunciation a foolish and expensive one.

Actually the Russian Treaties were another effort at the limited objective. In them Mr MacDonald was, again, clearing the ground. They regularised relations ; prevented estrangement ; laid the foundations for the next positive step. A beginning had to be made : the Treaties made it. In 1922 Mr Lloyd George had attempted a beginning at Genoa. He failed. The need remained : yet he was the first to denounce Mr MacDonald for a far more sincere, thorough, and candid attempt. The National Liberal Federation in May 1924 had urged, with irresistible cogency, the need for reconciliation and opening up of trade with Russia as sound on domestic grounds : the resolution even sanctioned a loan for the purpose. Yet Mr Lloyd George succeeded in stampeding all but a few consistent men in the Liberal Party against the Treaties. They refused to look at or to understand their

significance as an essential part of Mr MacDonald's peace policy. Two Tory newspapers—the *Observer* and the *Spectator*—did so with honourable intelligence; the Liberal press, with the temporary and hesitant exception of the *Manchester Guardian*, joined in the hue and cry, which in the election developed into “No money for murderers.”

Yet can anything be clearer than that any Government which tackles the problem of reconstruction with elementary intelligence must make treaties with Russia? Except that unless it is prepared to wait quite indefinitely and to let our own people pay the cost of its waiting, it must follow up this first step with a second—that of assisting Russia to float a reconstruction loan?

The Russian Treaties had, for Mr MacDonald, another important aspect, on which he touched in his speech at Geneva on 4th September. They could, he urged, be taken as an

“indication that the Russian Government is itself prepared to come in and be a part of the European system, and so, being here, to complete the authority and the influence of the League of Nations.”

Without Russia, without Germany, without the United States, the League could not be the comprehensive body that “has the authority to give security,” the security of mutual trust on which

Disarmament depends. As he put it frankly, in April 1924 :

“The position regarding armaments is perfectly simple. Until there is international agreement certain nucleus forces must be kept in existence. Until we get such agreement it is futile to assume that we are out of the military stage. Absolutism in this respect is neither more virtuous nor wiser than the humdrum method of working out the details of the problems and being loyal to both the facts and the ideals. But for this method of approaching the subject absolutism would for ever remain in the air.

“There is no use shutting our eyes to the fact that, if our foreign policy fails, armaments will return. Then there would be a new grouping of Powers in which Russia and Germany would play no inconsiderable rôle, and, finally, there would be a new world war. That, at any rate, was the condition of things which was being created up till when we took office—perhaps not always created consciously, but created as a matter of evolutionary inevitability.”<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, before the Assembly, he urged that arbitration is the only available, practical solution of the “problem of national security in relation to national armaments.” It affords the only test of aggression, the only safeguard against war.

“Our interests for peace are far greater than our interests in creating a machinery of defence. A machinery of defence is easy to create, but beware lest in creating it you destroy the chances of peace. What

<sup>1</sup> *New Leader*, 18th April 1924.

the League of Nations had to do is to advance the interests of peace. The world has to be habituated to our existence: the world has to be habituated to our influence. We have to embody in the world confidence in the order and rectitude of law, and then the nations, with the League of Nations enjoying authority, with the League of Nations looked up to not because its arm is great, but because its mind is calm, and its nature is just, can pursue their destinies in a feeling of perfect security, *none daring to make them afraid.*"

To that end he made the specific proposal that a commission should be appointed to give more definite form and bring up, before the Assembly's close, the optional arbitration clause in the International Court's Statutes—a proposal which bore fruit in the protocol for Arbitration.

"The essential condition of security and peace is justice, which must be allowed to speak. That is arbitration."

As to the length and difficulty of the task, he harboured no illusions. At the same time he knew and proved in action the truth of a remark he threw out at Dundee, when acknowledging the Freedom of the City: "The man of cynical mind is not a wise man: he is not the practical man he is supposed to be. *He is a lazy man*, the man of no vision, the man of no drive."

Between January and October 1924, vision and drive were applied to our relations with the

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rest of the world. As a result, Great Britain's power, prestige, and moral authority went up; solid work for peace was done; a new outlook was opened. Above all, a precedent was created: it was proved in action that goodwill is mightier than the mailed fist.



## CHAPTER IV

### SLIPPERY SLOPES

“Government consists in the application of ideas.”—Labour Club, 16th May.

A MINORITY Government lives with its life in its hand. Its existence is a perpetual Charge of the Light Brigade—cannon to right of them, cannon to left of them. This must be so even when the circumstances are normal and the Government represents one of the “in-and-out” parties.

The circumstances in 1924 were abnormal and precarious in the highest degree. Time-fuses, laid by others, were ready to go off, and did go off, all over the place. At home, British trade and industry had by no means recovered from the unprecedented and unnecessary slump that followed the profiteering boom of 1919-20. Unemployment, in its fourth winter, was, by the mere fact of its long continuance, more serious in its sufferings and economic reactions than before. Years of wage-cutting had left conditions in nearly every great industrial group so

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bad that a series of strikes were imminent and did, in fact, occur. The housing shortage had grown more acute through years of neglect and such tinkering legislation as provided only for the needs of a small group. The agricultural labourer and the small farmer were alike bordering on despair. Abroad, relations with Ireland produced one grave crisis: the Turkish question threatened another: Egypt another: India another: Iraq another. The Labour Government, in dealing with nearly every issue, and above all with any impinging on economics, had to meet attacks on both flanks in the House of Commons, to say nothing of conscientious sharpshooting from behind.

The second qualification is more important. The Government represented a new party whose very existence was a challenge to the "in-and-out" system. It stood for a view of social change which, though gaining adherents steadily, still in 1924 had opposed to it the mass weight of the governing classes and interests in finance, industry, commerce, as well as in politics, and had only begun to unsettle the permeating hold exercised by those classes directly and indirectly on the national mind. The force of habit, the ascendancy of what is over the imagination are mighty allies to any established system; it

continues to be accepted and believed in, long after it is falling into decay. By its very nature, Labour government was bound, sooner or later, to provoke an alliance of parties in the House of Commons, and a corresponding mobilisation of the opinion outside which they controlled through the newspapers. The more successful it was, the sooner must this happen. Success would underline and be interpreted as underlining its distinctive character, and the upstart would be set upon by those previously in possession. School-day memories will recall to everyone the case of the quiet new boy, who is left more or less in peace until he is found at the top of the class.

Anyone surveying the files of the press for 1924 will see how, practically from the first, this underlying apprehension coloured the outlook. That it should do so was natural. True, what the Parisian calls the *grande presse*—i.e. the big London and provincial dailies—was polite in general tone and reasonably appreciative in comment, so long and so far as it could present and chose to present the actions of the Labour Government as uncoloured by Socialism. Any thing or any utterance, however, in which the most suspicious eye could discern a Socialist tendency was at once jumped upon. Through-

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out, the atmosphere was one of watchful waiting, readiness to pounce. The exaggerated line taken, very early on, over the Poplar affair was a case in point. A piece of administrative realism and simple honesty was the occasion of a stupendous clamour. The recognition of Russia, the Evictions question and the Housing Act, showed the same thing. The Government was, as it were, on ticket-of-leave; every change of address had to be reported; any "suspicious" action rendered it liable to arrest; for anything that went wrong, it was hauled up. Outside the big dailies the press was never friendly. The cartoonists, of course, had a Russian complex from the start.

At the beginning, Mr MacDonald made it clear, both in the Albert Hall and in the House of Commons, that he relied on national support and trusted to national recognition of the intrinsic difficulties of minority government and the specially arduous problems with which, in 1924, it had to deal, to secure a suspension of purely party action against it. But the very instability of the party balance made these conditions impossible to secure for any length of time. He might strike party terminology out of his dictionary, but hardly anybody else did or could. It was not to be expected, in view of the

fundamental opposition between Socialism and Capitalism. A demonstration of Socialist efficiency was an experiment much too dangerous to be allowed to proceed. It might produce mass-conversion. Moreover, other parties had their future to consider.

From the first, therefore, and to the last, the position was unstable, not only with the normal instability of any minority administration but with a special, and specially difficult, instability of its own. The success of Mr MacDonald's work as Foreign Secretary, the reconciliation he effected between ourselves and France and between France and Germany, held in suspension the forces that came again into action so soon as this first piece of work was done. That work, by restoring the good name of Britain abroad, and its dominance in the councils of Europe, at one stroke cleared away a lion in the path of any future Government that would wrest the place from Labour, and removed the moral compulsion imposed on the opposition parties by general opinion outside. On the one hand, office was no longer the bed of thorns it had been when he took on. It had become a place worth having. On the other, competitors for it could say that they had held their hands for a decent period ; they could and did turn, then, to consider their own positions.

To do so was particularly urgent for Liberals, if they were not to be snuffed out altogether.

From the first Labour had, in the Liberal Party, the false friend who is more dangerous than the open enemy. Mr Asquith's statement that Liberals were in control was one of those awkward threats which compel action ; it must, ultimately, compel the Liberal Party to appear to justify it by putting out the Government they had, by their own account, and of their own motion, put in. From the start their " control " was limited to their power at a given moment to throw their weight behind the Tories. A Government doing national work, knowing itself supported by general assent, was no more dependent on Liberals than on Tories. This truism became unpleasingly plain to the Liberal leaders. Impotence reacting on parliamentary manners made them unpopular in the House. They talked alternately of giving the Government its programme and of turning it out. Since quite plainly they were not doing the first, they had, to save their faces, before very long to do the second. Otherwise they would be laughed at by their own followers—and Liberals, traditionally, cannot bear to be laughed at. The problem for them became one of tactics. This gave Mr Lloyd George his chance. Lord Beaverbrook has re-



counted in the columns of the *Sunday Express* how he used it, in the first week of October, to persuade Mr Chamberlain, with the assistance of Lord Birkenhead and Sir S. Hoare, to induce the Tories to run away from their own motion on the Campbell case and support the Liberal Vote of Censure. This action was the reassertion of a purely party, as against a national, attitude. So soon as the purely party view was strongly reasserted, Labour was doomed.

Since parties are real, and not artificial forces in our national life, this result was, sooner or later, bound to occur. It came sooner rather than later, because Labour's distinctive political attitude was a fact which the Labour Party did not wish to obscure and the other parties must seek to stress or risk allowing Labour to gain an increasing hold on public opinion outside. Time was its ally.

Thus the atmosphere was by the very nature of the case one in which an election was always looming. Could this have been avoided ? Hardly. The Oppositions inside and out (and that outside was more important) could only have been conciliated by a definite and specific repudiation of Socialism. Wild horses would not have dragged anything of the kind from Mr MacDonald. It would, anyhow, have been an ineptitude : Socialism



is not a mere label. It is a principle of order, and a statement of scientific tendency which may be forwarded or retarded but cannot be denied. Little as he cares for words or labels, he cares greatly for ideas and things and has a firm grip on the relation of means to ends. The Government was there to do work. Good work, thoroughly thought out and efficiently conducted on a coherent plan, must be work towards Socialism, since Socialism is the only plan of scientific and intelligent organisation. It is convenient for people to leave out the fact that he is a Socialist, *i.e.* that he believes Socialism to be true, but so soon as they do so they leave fact for fancy. A Labour Government led by him must be Socialist in idea however loyalty to conditions restricted its application. There is no other way of working with the grain of things. Intelligent constructive work, the demonstration of efficiency in administration given by the Government, and its growing measure of public confidence—these things were bound to suggest the question: "Why, how, is this Government more competent, better, than other Governments?" And the answer was bound, often, to be "Because it has got an intelligent and intelligible plan, a map by which it proceeds." Further, while the spectacle of a Cabinet, mainly composed of men

of working-class origin, proving eminently workmanlike, broke down one fixed association of ideas; the admixture in that Cabinet of men of different social origin but identical conviction, broke down another. Labour was seen to be different from what it had been ignorantly imagined. It was "fit to govern," and it was not a Class Party. Here were two new ideas of great potential carrying power: two highly effective battering-rams against the fortress of habit.

Mr MacDonald with his patience and thoroughness of method probably desired at first to do no more than sow this seed. He adhered honestly to the conditions he had laid down for himself: he regarded government not as an opportunity for advertisement but for work—work, badly needed by the suffering peoples, in whose educational effect he trusted, but which he viewed largely as an end in itself. But he had to reckon with two forces that made the whole thing an adventure, a race with time. To a very limited extent only was it possible to get ahead of press denunciation, hostility, perversion. The press knew, at least as well as he did, the educational effect of quiet work if allowed to go on quietly. Nor did they forget the essential antithesis between Labour and the other parties. On the one

hand they pounced on every problem, every difficulty, with cries of "After three, six, nine months of Labour Government here is this evil still"; on the other they never ceased to suggest that the Government was a wolf in sheep's clothing. If they had to praise anything—for instance, Mr Snowden's Budget—they declared that there was no Socialism in it. This did not in the least prevent them from denouncing Mr Wheatley's Housing Act alternatively as "Socialist finance" and as "bolstering up Capitalism." In doing so, they hoped to kill two birds with one stone. For the press, indeed, the dilemma was nearly a perfect one. Anything accomplished was either attacked as being Socialistic or, if praised, praised for not being so; at the same time, any and every evil that existed was written up as proof of the "failure of Socialism."

Those who clamoured for Socialist advertisement played straight into their hands. Mr MacDonald wanted to do work of national service and let it speak for itself. To talk about what you are doing, while it is doing, is not the sound craftsman's way. He had to deal with, and use as his material, people who wanted to blow trumpets, were more interested in that than in results. There was no advertisement about the London Settlement and little appreciation of it,

in consequence, from a section of his own supporters. That same section advertised the Russian Treaties in a manner that gave excuse for distortion and enabled the Bolshevik scare to be got going again. Especially bad was the effect produced by the publication of a letter to the press which suggested that the group of M.P.'s who, at a late stage, had rendered formal assistance by bringing parties, not seriously separated, into renewed contact, had, in fact, "gingered" up the Government and caused it to do what it did not want to do. This, of course, was false in fact and implication. No gingering had been required or applied. At no stage was the Government run or pushed by any section. It was, however, precisely what the press wanted. "The Government is run by its extremists." They had only been waiting for that. At the same time an excuse was given to the Liberals for entering into combination with the Tories. They could and did say that while ready to be friendly with Labour they had no use for "wild men." This letter did as much harm as the famous "Red" letter, perhaps more harm with rational opinion. It gave a cue that was taken up immediately. It is from its publication, indeed, that there dates the opening of the attack on the Labour Government whose preliminary rumblings, audible in the later stages

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of the summer session, became unmistakable during the September recess.

Despite occasional squalls, and those defeats on subsidiary issues that belong to its minority position, the Government, up to the middle of August, seemed to have behind it a solid measure of national esteem. Between 16th August and 30th September, however, something happened which changed the outlook completely. With the signature of the London Settlement it passed out of relatively smooth waters into an extremely choppy piece of sea which proved only the foretaste of the storm that was to blow up into the deluge. In this change three principal factors may be noted, in order not of importance but of time. First, the results of Mr MacDonald's pre-occupation with his Foreign Office work began to come home in various directions. The presentation of the Russian Treaties was badly mismanaged, partly as the result of his absorption in the London Conference. In home policy there was a lack of grip and imagination, and it was felt that the Cabinet was living from hand to mouth. It had done good work in Housing, the Budget, Education, and Pensions ; but less was said of this than of the dilatoriness of the Board of Trade in grappling with unemployment. The Minister of Labour's earlier boast that unemployment was

declining was a stick to beat the Government with so soon as it began to go up. The ill-judged arrest of a writer in the *Workers' Weekly* gave the dying Communist Party an advertisement by which they, the Tories, and the press were quick to profit and to use in the campaign against the Russian Treaties. Combustible material was accumulating.

Second, the uncomfortable relations between the Government and the Liberals had been growing worse and worse. The Liberals had pursued a policy of damaging obstruction; Mr Lloyd George was exploiting disgruntlement to gain hold of the tactical direction of the Party. The Russian Treaties, and, above all, the letter about them, provided a golden opportunity for the preparation of the Pact.

Third, whether or not at this stage on a definite plan, the press, and notably the Liberal press, changed its attitude. Respect gave place to thinly-veiled hostility. The phenomenon was so marked that it is difficult not to feel that Labour's success was a thing outside the contract. In other words, at the back of the minds of those press directors who acquiesced in Labour government, as of those who directed Liberal counsels in January and pressed support of Labour's Vote of Censure on 21st January (and by their own boast Mr Lloyd George and his henchman, Mr



M'Curdy, took the lead at this stage), was the belief that any Government which took over and attempted to administer the "bankrupt estate" must come down in the attempt. Certainly at home and abroad the inheritance was one to frighten the strongest. Yet, contrary to the clever calculations of the confederates, Mr MacDonald had wrested victory from the jaws of defeat. He had added insult to injury by moving from the pacification of Central Europe to making peace with Russia. Quite plainly he was a much more dangerous man than had been allowed for. There was no saying what he might not pull off next. He was building into the nation's mind a conception of the Labour Government, and, above all, of himself, that evidently appealed and attracted.

So soon as it seemed good to the Oppositions to combine, they could defeat the Government, and, if they chose to do so on a major issue, turn it out. That is a truism—the ratio, 191 to 615, speaks for itself. It is the rock-bottom fact in any argument about the election. In September the Russian Treaties provided a major issue. The first step, then, was to create an atmosphere that made the Government's position untenable. The Campbell case provided a convenient opportunity.

To the historian of the future it will be a puzzle to understand why this case created so much



excitement, especially if, after reading Sir Patrick Hastings' lucid speech on 8th October, he turns to Mr Baldwin's reply to Mr MacDonald on 18th December. During the election, accusations of "improper" conduct by the Attorney-General and the Prime Minister were made from the housetops by ex-Chancellors and ex-Attorney-Generals, because Sir Patrick Hastings had communicated to the Cabinet his decision to drop the prosecution he had instituted against Mr Campbell, on the ground, first, that he was not the editor of the *Workers' Weekly*; second, that he had a record of painful gallantry; and, third, that to advertise Communist propaganda was stupid. Seven weeks after the election, Mr Baldwin, speaking as Prime Minister, and with the knowledge of the precedents that could be cited, said :—

"In the view of H.M. Government, it was the duty of the Attorney-General, in the discharge of the responsibilities so entrusted to him, to inform himself of all relevant circumstances which might properly affect his decision.

"Where the proposed prosecution was of such a character that a matter of public policy was or might be involved, it was the duty of the Attorney-General to inform himself of the views of the Government or of the appropriate minister before coming to a decision."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 18th December 1924.

Unless, however, the historian appreciates the psychological significance of this incident, he will be unable to estimate the forces surrounding the first Labour Government. In its handling by the Oppositions in the House, as, later, outside, as well as in the press throughout, there was revealed a singularly ugly aspect of the "class-war." At Westminster, the Government's spokesmen were inferentially treated as prisoners in the dock, whose every word was to be taken in evidence against them. Ordinary political decencies and courtesies were exchanged for an Old Bailey atmosphere. "What can you expect from these people?"—that was the note always sounded, with, behind it, the arrogant assumption that the standard of honour and conduct of Labour was somehow inferior, not the same as "among us"; that it would swallow insults that, calmly considered, injured those who made rather than those who endured them.

Every charge of substance has now been dropped. We shall, as the *Times* smugly stated on 19th December, probably hear no more of the Campbell case. It has served its purpose. That purpose was to excite an atmosphere for the defeat of the Government on the favourable issue (favourable for the Oppositions, unfavourable for the Government) of the Russian Treaties. That was the

ground chosen by the Liberals. As the *Observer* put it on 28th December, in calm retrospect,

“ Mr MacDonald’s Administration received its death-wound at the hands of Liberalism, which committed Parliamentary suicide by the same singular act. Mr Asquith, Mr Lloyd George, and most of their colleagues strangely judged that their tactical opportunity had come on the Russian question, and they forced an election by repudiating the proposed Russian Treaty in advance instead of awaiting the text.”

Once a combination against the Government was formed on a capital issue, its foundations were gone. An election was inevitable. The Liberals saw to that.

At the time, of course, an attempt was made to throw responsibility for the election on to the Government. The Lib.-Lab. *New Statesman* led the hue and cry. To-day there are some, who, forgetting the facts, seem dubious as to the wisdom of the Cabinet’s decision. The question to be faced here, as on the question of taking office, is, “ What was the alternative ? ” To say to-day that in point of fact the Liberals, satisfied with humiliating Labour on the Campbell case, would not have proceeded to extremities against the Russian Treaties is easy, but unconvincing. They had, by then, entered into a combination from which they could not have extricated themselves. Moreover, for a Government, as for an individual, to accept

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humiliation is generally the prelude to more humiliation, not to recovery. Such a course would have been fatal to an administration dependent on goodwill, quite apart from the personal reflections to which it would have laid its members open. Confidence once gone, everything for the Government was gone. One reason among others, for example, why the discussions with Zaghlul Pasha terminated abruptly may well have been the impossibility of conducting negotiations without a full sense of national authority.

Opinion in the Labour Party at the time was enthusiastically for the decision to fight at once ; to take the Vote of Censure of 9th October as it was meant ; to refuse to pass under the Caudine Forks so pompously prepared. No one who was present at the conference in Queen's Hall can be in any doubt as to that. Delegates had little or no interest in the agenda : they were straining at the leash. When Mr MacDonald released them for the fight, their pent-up feelings broke out in tumultuous delight and approval. They may have been wrong : but in October their minds were undivided.

The decision is being judged now not on the circumstances of the time, but retrospectively, with the wisdom that comes after the event. The event was a shock ; it is, therefore, assumed

that to go on would have been better. Might it not, however, have produced an even more disastrous shock? One is moving among possibilities, of course; for the determinant element throughout was the incalculable flux and reflux of public opinion. Through the press, however, the forces opposed to Labour had a lever on opinion it had no means of counteracting.

The result, moreover, should not be exaggerated. Broadly speaking, it was a reversion to 1922. Then the Tories and National Liberals together polled the same total in round figures that the Tories (thanks largely to the Pact, which put the Liberal Party inside the Tiger) secured in 1924. Mr Baldwin's Protectionist excursion was a mere side-track: that out of the way, the electorate swung back. The British mind moves slowly; nine months is a brief period. In what will be said later of election methods and psychology it is not going to be suggested for a moment that the main outline of the result distorts or misrepresents the national mood. Such an effort would be ridiculous. The luck of the pendulum went to Tories in 1924 as to Labour in 1923: it amplified but did not make the totals. The nation has got the Government it wanted. There is no argument here for a change of voting system: provided the general will gets expression, de-

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mocracy is served. And in 1924 it did get expression. When candidates say that ignorance defeated them, they add nothing to common knowledge; prove only how incompletely they had done their work. Nine people out of ten in October expected to see the Tories back; even in October they were the strongest single party. The extent of the sweep surprised many. But the annihilation of the Liberal Party followed from the Pact, and the Pact at once swelled the Tory total and reduced that of Labour. Was it not for this that it was created? It was an Anti-Labour Bloc. Mr MacDonald, speaking at Manchester on 15th October, frankly admitted the probability of this result.

“It may be that in the constituencies a combination of Liberal and Tory may have for the moment the same effect that the same combination had in the House of Commons. It may be. I make a present to them of the victories they may have under that condition. . . . We can go down, we have been down before, but truth crushed to earth will rise again.”

There was, nevertheless, in the upshot, a difference between what actually occurred and what sober estimates (not his) predicted. No one, of course, hoped for an independent majority: optimists put their maximum at 250: calmer judges said 220. Anything above 200 would have satisfied nearly everyone. Actually, of course, though the



party vote went up by over a million, its representation went down by 40. Nearly all these seats were forfeited as the direct result of the Pact.

No merely arithmetical calculation, however, accurately expresses the result. It was psychological. Labour went back, not so much in numbers as in some imponderable quality previously attached to it. Quite what was lost, or whether the loss was more than purely temporary, no one can say, but the tendency to attribute the verdict to the Red Letter or to any other instance of atmospheric pressure, indicates a sense of something not amenable to statistical measurement.

To discover what actually happened it is necessary to turn now to an examination of the peculiar and distinguishing feature of the contest. It was Mr MacDonald's election. It was fought, that is to say, not only to put the Labour Government out but to bring him down. It was on him that the attack now to be described was concentrated. It is in the main because of that attack that the public mind shows at the moment of writing a temporary reversion to the muddled and mystified point of view about him that was general before 1924. The next two chapters may, therefore, be devoted to a rather closer inspection of the method by which this reversion was brought about.



## CHAPTER V

### THE ACT OF GOD

“Malignity and ignorance are the life, not the death, of what they attack.”—Queen’s Hall, 6th October.

MORE than one reputation was enhanced by the experience of government: Mr J. H. Thomas and Mr Snowden, to mention only two, gained greatly in general esteem. But from the first, as was indicated in the introductory chapter, Mr MacDonald bore the main burden and made the main contribution. When he assumed office there was a brief moment of suspended breath: people paused, rubbed their eyes, and kept them open in astonished and wondering attention. By the summer of 1924, the view that his was the dominating mind in Europe was an accepted commonplace. From every quarter the lime-light converged upon him and his figure grew, instead of shrinking, under the glare. Europe and America in varying tones congratulated Great Britain on a Prime Minister worthy of its highest traditions, and waited for the words

and deeds of a man who was pouring new life into the exhausted veins of a continent. An electric current of hope spread out from him in every direction. The prestige and moral reputation of Great Britain, which had fallen to nothing, rose visibly. Very soon he had achieved a personal popularity of a kind unknown since the days of Gladstone. Downing Street was blocked by people : crowds surged in the streets when he went out of London, gathering even in remote country villages. Interest in and hope from politics was blown into a steady flame : the House of Commons was, by common admission, the most popular show in London, and queues sat all day on the benches waiting to get into the galleries. Abroad, recognition was equally marked and outspoken. The United States newspapers put him steadily on the front page, generally reserved exclusively for domestic matters. Everywhere it was agreed that the centring of public interest in him had a special accent. It was due not to the office, but to the man himself : belonged to Mr MacDonald, more than to the Prime Minister.

For years he had enjoyed the confidence and excited the affection of the Labour movement he had done so much to build up ; something of this confidence and of this affection was, during

the first half of 1924, communicated to the public outside. Innumerable men and women, not much interested in or concerned with parties or even with politics, were being compelled to believe in him and, almost unawares, to take a new attitude to Labour and Socialism because of him. He became popular in a quite special sense, a sense connected with the feelings people do not talk about. "He is a white man," said a typical country Tory, and the little phrase covered much.

Mr H. W. Nevinston, in the account he gave later of the election tour, described a "passionate affection, revealed from the top of England, through the centre, and to the side far into Wales," and, endeavouring to explain it, wrote :

"Apparently there is something irresistible in the man himself. He has that power which Goethe was the first to call 'personality.' I cannot define the origin of that power. One may call it 'quality'; one may call it 'significance.' It is partly physical. Look along the front row of any platform where he is, and when your eyes reach him you will say at once, 'There's the man !' There is the singularly handsome head, the tall and active frame ; the voice of wide and powerful range, sometimes wearied on this journey after the fifty speeches or more, most of them in the open air, but a voice always responding to the compelling spirit within that seemed to rise to new life at the sight of every

new audience ; and the larger the audience the more inspiring was the life.

“ All those enviable qualities contribute to the power of ‘ personality.’ But something more is needed, and I hardly know how to describe it. The trained intellect is there, the record of hard, intellectual toil, the wide and accurate knowledge of the world and its problems, whether Indian or European. There is also the keen and cultivated appreciation of beauty, whether of nature or of art. But as the highest gift of his ‘ personality ’ I think I should put the rare and beautiful power of sympathetic imagination—that gift of mental vision which can make the sorrows and labours and joys of other men and women his very own.”

Mr Nevinson describes mainly what “ his own people ” felt. The impression, however, was not confined to them. It was general, and extended beyond Britain to Europe and the United States. It rested in part on his work, on what he was known to have done, especially for peace ; but not only or even mainly on that. One reason among others why his actions and his speeches were causing the idea of Socialism to strike timid roots in the minds, especially of young men and women, was that he stands practically alone among Socialist leaders for the wide, generous, and complete Socialism which embraces and indeed arises out of an apprehension of the infinitely varied strands that go to the building of social life. Like William Morris, he sees Socialism

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as the release of the artist spirit imprisoned to-day to the impoverishment not of the frustrated artist only but of the whole community. Utility, as he told the members of the Architecture Club, had never in his mind been dissociated from the idea of doing something beautiful as well. Economics must be among the tools of the Socialist workman, but without a sense of creative beauty his most powerful lever is missing. Some, for instance, imagined that when, as Premier, he opened the Frank Brangwyn Exhibition, spoke to the Architecture Club or at the National Gallery banquet, he was "getting at the middle-classes." Not at all. He was expressing the same strain in himself that comes out irresistibly when he talks to the fisherfolk of Lossie or the miners of Aberavon, and calling to the same strain in his audience. A sense of beauty is the least class-conscious thing there is.

Certainly there was a general, if obscure, awareness during the first months of his Premiership of a special accent belonging to his success. Morals it was felt, if not said, had come back into politics ; character had triumphed over mere cleverness. The plain man had a conviction that Mr MacDonald was somehow different from other politicians ; the more sophisticated were aware in him of an odd and haunting power of connecting

the human landscape with the quiet of the sky. The cynical had to allow for surprises about human nature. The common element in his appeal was a sense of character. His actions, his speeches, his bearing had revealed courage, faith, a wide and generous outlook: behind that was felt a man of fearless rectitude, with the purity and the comprehensive charity of the good.

This impression about Mr MacDonald himself was the main asset that Labour had to throw into the scales. It held them balanced up to the middle of August. It was an atmosphere, like the atmosphere he had created in Europe. Suspicion and distrust had largely been dissipated: in their place was this sentiment, warmer than interest, faintly tinged with reverence. From other politicians he was distinguished by something like a halo.

Since this halo was the intangible and at the same time effective bulwark of Labour, to break it was the surest method of breaking Labour's hold. This is the clue to the tactic pursued from the middle of August on. The method throughout was one of personal attack. It started almost before the ink on the London Settlement was dry. Thus, Mr Snowden's interview with the *Manchester Guardian* (19th August) was assiduously written up to suggest, first, personal



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conflict between the two men; and, second, unflattering contrasts between the rigid straightforwardness of the one, and the supple sophistication of the other.

No progress could be made on the first line since Mr MacDonald said nothing. The second was to do duty again and again, in different forms. A great "ambiguity" stunt followed apropos of the publication, on 13th September, of the fact that, months ago, a motor car had been given to Mr MacDonald by a wealthy friend. The facts were innocent enough. Mr MacDonald and Sir Alexander Grant had been poor "Lossie loons" together, and, for years, attached by a personal friendship unaffected by difference in fortune and political views. When the poor one became Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary he found that the salary (he only took one) was barely sufficient, as Mr Asquith has stated, to cover necessary expenses; the wealthy one meeting him after a heavy day's work and a speech in the evening, found him making his way to Chequers by the Underground. Thereupon he insisted on giving him a car and endowing it with capital for its upkeep. Nothing secret in a transaction which, seriously considered, did honour to giver and taker; the transference of shares was registered in the ordinary way. Nevertheless the publication—on the date chosen



by the press—was made the occasion for a stream of comment on “the Socialist turned Capitalist.” The re-issue about this time of the Premier’s book on *Socialism, Critical and Constructive*, with a preface in which he reiterated the view he has always held that the strike is a phenomenon not of Socialism but of Capitalism, was used as another chance for elaborating this same theme. No one at this stage dared to do more than insinuate, but the insinuations were skilfully made, and a trickle of talk was set going and kept going. The little cloud, no bigger than a man’s hand, had appeared in the sky.

Before this, however, a change in the tone of the press had declared itself. In the early days of September Mr MacDonald broke his very much abbreviated and sorely needed holiday to attend the League of Nations Assembly at Geneva. The *New Statesman*, conspicuously hostile as a rule, wrote (23rd September):

“ If the Prime Minister keeps a diary he might fairly write in it of his visit to Geneva, ‘ I came, I saw, I conquered.’ His success was not, as a few of the meaner critics have pretended, purely personal and oratorical. In his attitude towards the League and towards the main problem of Central Europe, in the principles that he rejected and in the principles that he supported, he stood for the solid mass of Englishmen. By his presence and his conduct at the Assembly he has enhanced British prestige. He has also enhanced the prestige of the League.”

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The "meaner critics" to whom the *New Statesman* refers were a very comprehensive assembly. Anything more chilling and belittling than the comments of the main organs of the London press it is impossible to imagine. One read his speech: read their notes and leaders and rubbed eyes. Something was happening.

It was. The campaign was by now under way.

It was reinforced from various quarters. The motor car incident was, ingeniously, woven in and out of the attack on the Russian Treaties, which were presented as a humiliating instance of capitulation to "extremist pressure," and of the talk about the Campbell case. The charges were developed, moreover, along purely personal lines into whose details it is unprofitable to enter. When, towards the end of September, Mr MacDonald, speaking at Derby just before the special session, summoned to put through the Irish Boundary Bill, complained that "they have been maligning and slandering us, and even our personal character has not been sacred," he was thoroughly justified on facts. On the Campbell case, too, the attack developed into sheer personalities: the alleged constitutional issue—not understood at any time by more than one in a thousand of newspaper readers—was submerged under innuendoes.

During the election this personal campaign against him developed to extraordinary proportions. From a study of speeches and newspaper articles, it would appear that the principal issue was his character : the main object of the Oppositions to destroy it. Tardily, on 22nd December, the *Star* suggested that " those Tory scribes who have set themselves systematically to write him down are overdoing it," and went on to say, " Who issued the order for this campaign to belittle the ex-Premier no one knows, but it has been taken up in a manner that suggests something done to order."

A campaign there certainly was, but not, as the *Star* suggests, an exclusively Tory one. The Liberal leaders and the Liberal press put at least their quota into the common pool. And, throughout, the stream of denunciation, belittlement, and vilification was directed on Mr MacDonald. The point need not be laboured. It will be within the recollection of every one.

The logic of this concentration was rational enough. In the early days of the Government it was presented in its reverse form. Mr MacDonald was extolled at the expense of his colleagues. Praise of him was used inferentially to belittle them. He carried the Government on his back. Without him it could neither have come into

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being nor have maintained being for a week. I remember having this point of view put to me with engaging frankness by a distinguished editor of highly objective mind.

"Your party," he said, "is safe—save for an Act of God." He paused; then smiled. "Yours is a one-man show. Take MacDonald away. . . ." He waved an eloquent hand.

This was said about Easter. It went on being said, in differing tones, more and more openly. There was nothing very startling about it—it was a truism and might have been left at that. That it had its dangers was also obvious. They were dangers that its subject might have seen, and, if he had seen, done something to mitigate. An "Act of God" is an event which men will try to produce. Instead, he played into the hands of those who were, later, to exploit every one of those dangers. A tendency crept into his speeches which, at the time, might be dismissed with a regretful shrug of the shoulders, but now has to be assessed as playing its part in the bitter and disproportionate price exacted for it. He talked too much in terms of himself, too little in terms of his colleagues and his party. Take as an instance the very fine address he gave at the Contemporary Art Society's Exhibition in June—a speech admirable in itself, which it seems

ungenerous to dissect—and ask what impression it gives. Certainly the impression that the speaker is a man of imagination, culture, artistic response, who can touch spirits to fine issues. Yes ; but by May and June, if not before, the public knew that about Mr MacDonald. They had read his addresses at the National Gallery banquet, at Brighton, at the Press Club, at various National Day Celebrations, at the Frank Brangwyn Exhibition. There was a different opportunity here—an opportunity directly indicated by Lord Henry Bentinck in his opening remarks ; the opportunity of suggesting that there was a natural sympathy not only between himself and the Arts, but between the Labour Party and the Arts. “He’s all right—what about the others ?” That was being said. He could have met it, and truthfully, and, by doing so, have laid a very real spectre. The separation between him and the rest was, later, to give an excuse to many to believe silly stories of pressure, and to refuse to commit themselves to a party because they believed in a head who seemed to them too strikingly distinct to carry it with him. He missed the chance here and on subsequent occasions. It was a double chance—a chance of associating the Party with an adventure from which, owing to many circumstances, it felt a little excluded ; and, more important, a

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chance of carrying across to the public an idea which would have protected them and him from misapprehensions to which his elevation exposed him.

Unhappily, instead of doing this, he allowed the tendency to talk in "I" to grow. He spoke of "my Government" and "my poor Chancellor," and it was not liked. A hyperbolical strain, moreover, intruded, and was assisted by his frequent familiar references to the Almighty, culminating in the famous sentence about "having somewhat of the powers of the Creator." Few instances can be cited that are not defensible in their context. Wrested from it, they helped to build an impression of one who, in his own mind, is not as others are ; who takes, as they say, too much upon himself.

The effect did not stop there, moreover. It is common experience that praise makes people more sensitive, not less, to criticism. The man hardened, at all events externally, to criticism, even to abuse, by habituation, having even grown a sort of shell against it, will break down at a word of praise. The more blows he has had to stand, the more unnerving do caresses prove. After a brief experience of them, a flick in the face that, in his bad days, would hardly have been noticed, cuts him to the quick. Mr MacDonald got little



but abuse from 1914 down to 1922 ; between 1922 and 1924 the criticism slowed down but was still there, in wait ; for a few months in 1924 it practically ceased, and, instead, tributes poured in. They came from every quarter that gave them value. If criticism went on, it was of the meaner order : indeed could be said to be an inverted form of tribute. "Decent" people said nice things about him at home and abroad ; from what the others said he was, for the first time in his life, largely sheltered. Quite suddenly he leaped into distinguished and deserved popularity. It was inevitable that if and when the cold blast blew again he should feel it more acutely than he had done in the days when he was constantly exposed to its onset, and had developed a secondary skin. A sudden change of temperature is always troublesome. In the early autumn the barometer suddenly dropped.

It dropped to a sort of weather especially hard for a proud and sensitive man to stand. Political charges are one thing : personal another. The motor car incident was being used, skilfully and insidiously, to cast doubts on his personal rectitude. The fact that he had said nothing about it at the time was made much of. People who, really, saw nothing in that or in the whole incident but a certain simplicity, nevertheless allowed



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themselves to be led on, by press and partisan handling of this and of the Campbell case, to a muddled and mystified feeling of doubt. No one now thinks, no one could think after Sir Patrick Hastings' statement on 8th October, that there was anything ambiguous in the case at all; but at the time Mr MacDonald's own speeches lent themselves to misinterpretation. No one thought he was not candid, but some doubted whether he was being entirely frank. Few outsiders seemed to have grasped the meaning of the insulting treatment to which he was being subjected in the House of Commons. On top of the gradually accumulating press campaign, it was calculated to make any honest man see red and any sensitive one hit out.

Natural sensitiveness was exaggerated by the extreme strain of his position. The "one-man show" was a grim reality, when it came to that. His powers of endurance and of recuperation are marvellous, but in October he was a tired man. He had had the briefest of nominal holidays—no Foreign Secretary has a holiday from despatches—a bare ten days between the London Settlement and the Geneva Conference. His extreme fatigue and pallor struck people at Dundee, where he broke his homeward journey from Geneva to receive the Freedom of the City and

make a series of speeches. Ten days later he was back in London again, up to the eyes in Ireland, Egypt, Russia, the Campbell case. On 26th September he made a big speech at Derby; on 30th September and 2nd October he spoke on Ireland in the House of Commons; there were interviews with Zaghul Pasha on the 4th and 6th; on 7th October he delivered the Chairman's address and presided at the Labour Party Conference in London. Neither here, nor in his speech to the Conference on the 9th, was there any sign of mental fatigue. He was challenging, vigorous, victorious: the Party rose to him with enthusiasm. Yet he admitted to a friend, that afternoon, that he was "tired through and through." The load was enormous: to carry it under perpetual sharp-shooting and sniping, from every quarter, wellnigh intolerable. But there was no reflection of this in his public address. An election was going to be a fearful strain: he seemed to laugh at it. That was the surface. The real signal of his fatigue was the danger-note appearing in these speeches that was to sound louder subsequently—the note of exaggerated claim and pained resentment of attack. Tactically, on the eve of an election, such a note was mistaken. Mr MacDonald has always fought and taught others to fight on the

opponent's ground; attack, not defence, was the injunction he himself gave his stalwarts at Queen's Hall. In the actual case, however, attack, unless very carefully interpreted, was a dangerous line. The Government was going to the country on its performance. It was to stand on its record, appeal for confidence on work done, rebut charges by achievement, state a positive policy. True, it had been insulted; the best answer to insults was to disregard them with calm scorn and point to work—since they were made to distract the nation's mind from that work.

In his own case the argument for this line of conduct was strong. To descend into the arena, to reply to charges, above all to charges against himself, was to play the enemy's game. They were trying to push him off his pedestal. To leave it himself was fatal. However hard it must be for him to hear in silence the things said, insinuated, whispered, and, so soon as the election started, shouted, about him, he must take the high line: refuse to lower his eyes. He could afford to leave his character to speak for itself; or at worst, leave his followers to speak of it. A man who had behind him his record of service and achievement, could afford to stand upon it. The vital asset of the Party was that he was different from the average

politician ; essential, now, to maintain that difference and refuse to answer back.

Unfortunately, Mr MacDonald's enthusiastic aides-de-camp arranged his election campaign in a manner that made this high line practically impossible. A plan was devised which displayed, only too plainly, that little as their chief might know himself, they knew him even less. Politics are sometimes said to be an inhuman business ; never was that inhumanity more stupidly evidenced. What was planned, and carried through, was a great motoring tour from Glasgow to Aberavon, involving for its principal practically continuous speaking. The physical strain of this was, obviously, tremendous. Mr Lloyd George had carried through such a tour in 1922 ; but the precedent only showed the dangers. He possesses special gifts and immunities for this sort of exercise. Light-hearted and light-minded, he can throw off speeches without strain or sense of responsibility. His discontinuity of mind conserves his energy. Moreover, he is past-master of the art of saying nothing. In 1922, in addition, he had a walk-over in his own constituency. Mr MacDonald, on the other hand, with his stern conception of duty, his highly strung nervous organisation, and his logical method of speech, takes a great deal out of himself when

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he speaks. While he worked for others, he had to leave behind him a stiff fight in Aberavon—a constituency with a very brief Labour record, entirely of his own creation. He went into the election tired in body, and with an immense burden of responsibility on his mind. His physical and nervous strength and powers of recuperation are remarkable; but the effort of a hectic speaking tour was bound to be, for him, expensive out of proportion to its real results.

The risks were indeed far greater than the cheery promoters could or would perceive. They refused even to consider the physical strain. Mild reminders of it were laughed away with contempt. Why should not a man die for the Cause? That a live man is more useful than a dead lion did not seem to occur to them. Nor was there any adequate realisation by the electioneering experts that the man in question was Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary as well as a party leader, and that consequently he could not do as other candidates, and leave his ordinary business behind. It had to, and would, follow him everywhere. So little was this appreciated that Mr MacDonald was for more than seven days without so much as a secretary.

This light-hearted negligence was the less excusable that Mr MacDonald is abnormally in-

different to, and careless of, his own comfort, and Spartan to excess in his personal habits. However late he went to bed at Downing Street—and Foreign Office despatches generally kept him up to the small hours—he always breakfasted with his children between 8 and 8.30, and frequently worked before. In his Hampstead home, until quite recently, he had to descend two flights of stairs to speak on the telephone. Even at a period when he was apt to suffer excruciatingly from neuritis, he would go off walking, in winter weather, without so much as a change of stockings; has walked for days with a nail in his shoe. Again and again he has risked serious illness by keeping speaking engagements when he ought to have been in bed. After the first Paisley by-election, for instance, he paid for this sort of conscientiousness by an attack of bronchitis which left a weakness that made a series of out-of-door meetings, in autumnal weather, a specially risky proceeding. All those who know him know that he is signally incapable of looking after himself; the knowledge ought to have made them considerate. It did not.

The absence of a secretary was serious enough. It was made worse by the absence of anyone responsible for the organisation of the tour itself. The smooth working of such a plan required



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the science of a skilled man, always a stage ahead, to plan and handle the press and other arrangements. No such person was there. Lord Arnold, who at the last moment agreed to accompany him, did all a friend could do, but he was there as a companion, not as a courier. Details were largely left to chance. Some—*i.e.* the loud-speaker—broke down ; others were wrong from the start.

One thing in particular was wrong from the start. Mr MacDonald at an early stage put in one proviso. He could not do five-minute speeches. There he was entirely right, both in theory and in practice. In practice he cannot speak for five minutes. The things he has to say require elbow-room. Five-minute speaking is a special and peculiar branch of the art : great speaker as he is, not his branch. In theory he was at least as sound. A Prime Minister, or indeed any leader, must make responsible utterances. What he says is a pronouncement—will be treated as such. The conditions of his speaking should be adjusted to that. Had this point of Mr MacDonald's been borne in mind, and the tour arranged on its basis, as a series of big demonstrations, in halls, at key-towns, all might have been well. It was not.

He, as is habitual with him, made his point ;



made it clearly; assumed it and its consequences to be understood; and left it there. He was wrong. It was not understood. Innumerable matters claimed his attention between the 9th and the 13th, when he departed from London for Glasgow; he left the details of the tour to others. When he saw his programme he knew that his instructions had been thrown to the winds: he was "in for it."

He was. A mere itinerary shows it. He left Euston at ten on the morning of the 13th and had to address large crowds there, at Rugby, at Crewe (over 2000), and at Carlisle. Indeed, from that moment he was never out of crowds clamouring for speeches. Mr H. W. Nevinson has said that the enthusiasm was, everywhere, far beyond anything in Gladstone's Midlothian campaign.

Enthusiasm is thrilling, but also fatiguing: in his speech at Glasgow on the evening of the 13th the characteristic marks of fatigue were present—notably the forcing of voice and gesture and the restless movement about the platform, which presented such insuperable obstacles to the broadcaster and account for the bad, "nervy" impression made by the speech on the millions who "listened in." Wireless can do full justice to the lecturer, none to the orator. The actual

audience was raised to a white heat. "The Prime Minister," said an eyewitness after the meeting, "has become the Gladstone of Labour." That the press agreed was shown by the bitter tone of its comments next morning; there was in them, from the sober *Daily Telegraph*, which spoke of the accents of a "common scold," downwards, that peculiar note of rancour that Gladstone had called out. It was to sound incessantly after this.

Next day, to quote the *Scotsman* (14th October),

"The Prime Minister made a rapid tour, in his famous Daimler motor car, through the centre and south-east of Scotland, the journey beginning in Glasgow and ending, so far as Scotland was concerned, when he crossed the border on the way to Newcastle. The programme mapped out for him was an arduous one, and provided for stoppages and speeches at a large number of towns and villages on the road. The countryside through which he passed was shrouded in mist, which hung heavily in the still air."

There were enthusiastic crowds everywhere, both in Glasgow and throughout. On the way to Stirling he spoke in Springburn for Mr G. D. Hardie, in Stirling and again in Falkirk for Mr Hugh Murnin, in Alloa Town Hall (a long speech) for Mr M'Neill Weir; in Linlithgow for Mr Shinwell; at Winchburgh, and elsewhere. At half-past one he was in Edinburgh, where he spoke to three thousand people in the Waverley Market for Mr

W. Graham—some idea of the effort involved being given in the remark that “he managed to make his voice heard.” After the briefest interval for lunch he addressed crowds in Portobello, Musselburgh, and Dalkeith. At 4.30 he was in the Lauder Town Hall speaking for Mr R. Spence ; at six, speaking in Jedburgh ; at nine (delayed for an hour on the way back by a thick fog) at Newcastle, addressing four thousand people inside the Hall, “and three times that number assembled outside in the fog to greet the Premier and listen to his speech through a loud-speaker.” Moreover, all along the route there were minor gatherings, to many of which he spoke. Next morning he started at Gateshead, and had spoken there and in Chester-le-Street before, at 9.40, he was being given “a rousing reception” at Durham ; spoke there, at Ferryhill, and at Darlington on his way to Ripon. He spoke at Ripon and at Harrogate, where he mentioned, “my throat is not quite so bad as yesterday morning, but between yesterday morning and this morning there have been twenty-seven meetings.” In Leeds three thousand people were gathered in the Corn Exchange ; after addressing them he went on to Cleckheaton, and thence to Batley, where a “huge crowd, a notable feature of which was the big preponderance of women,” crammed the Market Square. He spoke

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again at Huddersfield, where he had tea with Mr and Mrs Snowden. "So Oldham was reached, its common or park crowded with a multitude immeasurable in the darkness, and then Manchester itself, and the huge meeting in the Belle Vue Gardens hall." In Belle Vue, the biggest public hall in Manchester, he gave an hour and a half's speech, on a very high level, after an ovation that caused him to say, referring to the tour as a whole, that he had never experienced anything like it.

On Wednesday (16th) he traversed the Potteries and the Black Country on his way from Manchester to Birmingham, speaking at Macclesfield and Loughborough. Then "immediately Staffordshire had been entered, there began a series of continuous demonstrations by the wayside, culminating in an enthusiastic meeting at Hanley, where four thousand people assembled."

"All the way from Wolverhampton through Wednesbury, that very centre of desolation, and through West Bromwich up to Birmingham itself, the working people swarmed around the car, so thick that we could hardly move, even at foot's pace, and the cheering for MacDonald, 'Good Old Mac!' 'Dear Old Ramsay!' never ceased. 'If he was King, we couldn't do more!' cried a woman beside me, and that was true. It was the

same in Birmingham itself, where, in the huge covered market, such a meeting was gathered as I have nowhere seen. Fifteen thousand was the lowest estimate, and about twenty thousand listened to the amplifiers outside.”<sup>1</sup> At Stafford, Cannock, and Wolverhampton he spoke, but at Wednesbury his voice prevented his addressing the huge crowd, and at West Bromwich he only said a few words; at night he addressed a vast mass demonstration in Birmingham. Nothing wrong with the Birmingham speech; the speeches, indeed, show range, variety, and quality astonishing in the circumstances: he never made the same twice. But by now the price of these overwhelming exertions was beginning to be exacted. Next morning (the 17th), Thursday, he motored 130 miles from Birmingham through Worcester and Gloucester, down to Aberavon. The enthusiasm continued, and as he entered Wales reached a feverish point; but on the way he delivered fewer speeches than had originally been planned: the human machine could no longer be forced by the will in charge.

By now, moreover, he had had forced upon his notice the other side of the election—the amazing vulgarities of Mr Winston Churchill, Mr Lloyd George, and Lord Birkenhead on the motor car

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Nevinston, *New Leader*, 23rd Oct.

and Court dress ; the shameless mendacities of Sir Douglas Hogg and Sir Alfred Mond about the Campbell case, and the hardly more scrupulous diatribes of Sir John Simon. The Pact had definitely been formed, and its effect on the Liberal press, Liberal speeches, and Liberal tactics, was deplorable. One wishes, now, to forget the mud bath ; but it is necessary at this stage to recall it, and to remember that, by the end of the first week of the campaign, its distinguishing mark was the way in which people and papers, normally decent, plunged into it. One has only to compare the *Manchester Guardian* of these days with the *Manchester Guardian* which one happily presents, as a rule, to the foreigner, to gauge the tragic effect. No one could remain altogether immune ; least of all perhaps a man tired and nerve-racked as the Prime Minister now was. With the sense of grave responsibilities pressing on him, Foreign Office papers arriving nightly to be considered after the day's long work was done, and no secretary to assist him, it was natural that the personal attacks which were taking the place of political artillery should seem to him monstrous.

On the 17th he entered Wales. There the enthusiasm was stifling ; to a man harassed as he was, these scenes, for all the affection that lit them, must by now have begun to assume the



aspect of a nightmare. He spoke a few words to vast crowds at Newport, but at Cardiff his voice at first refused ; after lunch, however, " he found it imperative to utter a few words of hope for victory in the three Cardiff constituencies." Thence to Barry, where he fought his way in to the Theatre Royal and spoke ; from Barry on, through more crowds at Bridgend, Laleston, and Cefn, to Kenfig Hill, where he remarked that he was " absolutely tired, physically and mentally," but would be all right in the morning. By now he was in his own constituency, and the scenes, reported by eye-witnesses, beggared description. A crowd of over fifteen thousand greeted him at Taibach, Port Talbot, and Aberavon—people having come in char-a-bancs from all parts of the country. An unfriendly newspaper said :—

" Three miles outside Aberavon the Premier's party approached a dense mass of people, and the car had to proceed at a snail's pace right into Aberavon, the two or three miles of the journey occupying one and a half hours. Just before reaching Aberavon the Premier's car broke down owing to the surging of the people around. In order to make a way through the crowd he was assisted into a motor bus, and in this way continued his journey through the dense crowds until his hotel was reached. There were frantic scenes of delight when the Premier appeared at the window and said that Aberavon had helped to make the history of the Labour movement."



A long speech was impossible, but to-morrow he promised to be "as fresh as a daisy."

To-morrow, however, a sentence dropped in his speech at Barry was to present its accusing face to him from every newspaper. It was a tiny seed from which was to grow a mighty tree. Received at Barry with delight, the sentence was to be received with far more delight by his enemies and the enemies of Labour everywhere. At last they had got what they wanted, what they were waiting for. It was pounced upon; it echoed across the country, penetrating, in the way such things will, below the surface of public discourse into the far more sensitive region of private conversation. He had referred to misrepresentation, and said:—

"A Party who are on the verge of being beaten and disgraced always tell lies, as they are doing now. They talk about moving millions out of this country to Russia and all that rot. Why can't they make a decent intellectual fight of it, lay down their principles, put them against ours, and have an honourable set-to? Why do they slander us? Why, instead of having a great battle on a political principle, do they go about sniffing like mangy dogs on a garbage heap?" (Cheers and "Rub it in.")

It was rubbed in right enough. The *Daily Mail*, which has little to learn in the science of display, simply headed a column with the words

“The Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Foreign Secretary, the Rt. Hon. J. Ramsay MacDonald, says: ‘Why, instead of having a great battle on a political principle, do they go about sniffing like mangy dogs on a garbage heap?’”

It knew what it was doing. It knew that Mr MacDonald had been goaded into putting into its hand the weapon it wanted, which it could never have forged for itself. The shining armour which made him, and, through him, his party, strong, against which the sword of the world could not prevail, had dropped from him. What was said against him could be and was disregarded; what he had said himself could not be and was not. People whom arguments did not reach and could not affect were here within the region they understood. They had had a queer, rather shamefaced feeling about this man. Somehow he was different. Now, some joyously, some regretfully, they threw it away. He was not different: they could hate him and his policy as much as they liked. No more need to feel a little ashamed of repeating stories about motor cars and listening to sniggering innuendoes. What he had accomplished, for Britain, was forgotten: actions are nothing, words everything with contemporaries, though history does not agree; in

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politics the pound of feathers weighs more than the pound of lead. These feathers spread like a stifling cloud. Very probably Mr MacDonald himself alone in the country knew nothing of them and their effect. Their effect was smothering. They settled something in the election more significant than votes. Here was the "Act of God," of which the editor had spoken.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RED LETTER

“The Civil Services are responsible for advice: H.M. Government is responsible for policy. Therefore, when they attack, they must attack us.”—3rd March 1924.

IF the historian of the future finds the 1924 election interesting on no other grounds—and he will find it interesting on many—he will give it a place as the first in which the methods and discoveries of the new psychology were applied to an ignorant and highly suggestible mass mind. If he is sufficiently cynical, it may further please him to note that they were applied most skilfully by the managers of a party which, with superior insight, glories in the name of stupid. It is to the Freudian terminology that he will have to resort in his effort to characterise what happened between 13th and 30th October; he will find himself compelled, if he is to explain and not merely describe, to speak of the “MacDonald complex” and the “Russian phobia.”

The main lines in the building of the first have been indicated and the assistance given by its

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subject. Any careful student of Mr MacDonald's mind, as revealed in action, speech, or silence, will agree that, by every trait, good and bad, in his mental and moral make up, he is singularly disabled from dealing with the technique of the new psychology. He has his visions and his dreams. There is a strain of the mystic in him. But he moves up not down in his solitary contemplations, into a clearer, purer form of consciousness. He has never given any sign of knowing or wishing to know that dim region where the emotions secretly and painfully interact upon the will, whence formless images rise, apparently unbidden, to darken and dominate its workings, and impulses issue driving men to actions involuntary as those of the sleep-walker who refuses, on awakening, to acknowledge them as his own. The sinister suggestions attached to simple actions of his merely puzzled him. His one chance of breaking the coils being woven round him was to disregard them : when he tried to deal with them they closed more tightly, growing, like the hydra, seven heads for every one that was struck off. Explanations, any form of counter-attack from him, were fatal. Argument did not touch the case. It addressed itself to the head : the trouble was in the imagination, where a picture was forming terrible in proportion as its outlines swayed.

Without the aid of the Russian phobia this picture might not have availed, since it was colourless. The removal of the halo still left a human face. Gradually, however, the two, at first separate, became beautifully entangled. Mr MacDonald had been given a motor car; was it not a Red car? He wanted to give our money to Russia; was he not in their pay? Then there was the Campbell case: it had something to do with Bolsheviks; anyhow it was a fishy affair. There were wild men in his party; of course they called the tune, and it was a Bolshevik tune. Bolshevik—the very word had an unholy ring; Bolsheviks scoffed at God and man. Obscurely a connection with unspeakable things was suggested, so that when people saw him they saw—they knew not what. A murky cloud of suspicion, shot with dread, began to gather. Mystification, mounting apprehension, a dim sense of plots, the grim figure of Russia looming behind with all its terrifying associations, then—at the right moment—a real plot so serious that the unwilling Foreign Office had to admit it. Of course they had tried to hide it, but it exploded under their feet.

The Red Letter represented a complete fusion of complex and phobia. It did its work because of that: because of the insidious preparation



that had gone before. The work had been so ingenious that the Letter was probably unnecessary; but, as it was, it rounded the thing off, gave it a symbolic unity of design. Because of that, no argument however lucid, no demonstration however logical, was of any avail against it.

The atmosphere has not yet worn off. It worked like mustard gas: the eyes of those exposed to it still smart; they still cough and splutter when they think of it, and suffer from the curious unsettlement of nerve centres with which it affected them at the time. Months after the election it was rare to find a defeated candidate or worker for a defeated candidate, whether Labour or Liberal, who did not still feel a deep sense of inexplicable grievance, as of one sore from contact with evil spirits; many Labour M.P.'s suffer from it still. As at the time, so now, the obscurity of the whole thing was what made it potent. Out of that obscurity emerged judgments which cannot stand the test of calm examination.

It has been stated that the Letter settled the election. It undoubtedly sent people, frightened people, to the booths who might otherwise not have bothered to go out—and they did not vote Labour. It helped, with the Bolshevik scare, of which it formed the crescendo, to get below the

political into the unthinking electorate. The Labour vote did not go down ; it went up, by over a million, and practically all over the country ; on the other hand, the Tory vote went up even more. But though the Letter determined the issue, here and there, and swelled the Tory total, a Tory sweep was certain, from the moment that the Pact was formed. The Labour case, above all on the Russian Treaties, demanded from the electorate a modicum of calm attention. That the ignorant and inattentive elector is in the majority : that he is more readily swayed by fear than by any other emotion—it did not require a Red Letter to tell us that. Bolshevism would have served without any Letter, though the show would then have lacked artistic finish. The Letter, however, though not a sufficient explanation of the election result as a whole, symbolises only too aptly its particular character. It had serious special reactions at the time ; to some extent, they are still going on, mainly because of the semi-darkness by which the entire episode remains encompassed.

Some, if not all, of that darkness can be dispelled by anyone who takes the trouble to interrogate and collate the various public documents, and examines dispassionately the Note issued by the Foreign Office with the Letter. In the

account now to be given, no information has been used that is not accessible to everybody, except in relation to one detail, to be mentioned when it occurs. It can, therefore, be tested by the degree to which it is coherent.

On 25th October, the Saturday before the Poll, all the newspapers gave pride of place to what they mostly called "An Election Bombshell." It took the form of a letter signed or purporting to be signed, by Zinoviev, President of the Third (Communist) International. This letter urged that the fate of the Treaties depended on the pressure already brought to bear on the unwilling MacDonald Government being increased, the proletariat being roused, being convinced of the folly of "the peaceful extermination of Capitalism," and being brought to the point of insurrection in Army and Navy by propaganda. "Agitation propaganda," as conducted by the British Communist Party, to whom the Letter (countersigned by M'Manus, its President and a member of the Third International Executive) was addressed, is described as "unsatisfactory": both it and cell formation inside the Trade Unions as requiring to be tightened up. In all this, of course, the Letter expressed views again and again put out from the Third International. If authentic, however, it was certainly a formidable

document. With it was published a Foreign Office Note to M. Rakovsky, signed by Mr J. D. Gregory "in the absence of the Secretary of State" which "invited attention" to the Letter and its insurrectionary propaganda, and, in its opening paragraphs, said some very harsh things as to the impossibility of dealing with a Government run by a body of the character and aims disclosed in it.

To most people the whole thing came as a bolt from the blue. Not to all, however. It is a matter at least of curious coincidence that the *Times* on 24th October should have been inspired to devote a long first leader to an Anti-Bolshevik Note issued by the U.S. Government in 1920 and to cite from it various passages about the perils of propaganda. What they had up their sleeve had been suggested on 22nd October (three days before the Note appeared) when the London correspondent of the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* wrote :

"There is a report here, to which much credence is attached, that before polling day comes a bombshell will burst and it will be connected with Zinoviev."

A portrait of Zinoviev helped to draw readers' attention to the prospect thus disclosed. The accuracy of this correspondent's statement was established on 27th October (Monday) by the

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parliamentary correspondent of the *Times*. Not only did he say that "*during the past week it was a matter of common gossip*" that a message from Zinoviev had been intercepted: he added further that "there is good reason to believe that the letter was intercepted and was in the possession of the Foreign Office a day or two before Parliament was dissolved on 9th October." Further, he went on to say:

"It is understood that certain officials at the Foreign Office had been pressing for the publication of the document and the reply to it for at least a fortnight, but it was agreed that nothing could be done until the most exhaustive enquiries had been completed. By 5 o'clock on Friday afternoon, apparently, the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office had been convinced of the authenticity of the document, and the order to make the document and the reply public was then given. It is stated on good authority that the Prime Minister, though not in London, was kept informed of every development, and that he approved the action which had been taken at the Foreign Office."

Evidently some people knew a good deal about the bombshell before it exploded.

Without waiting to hear anything from Mr MacDonald, or paying any attention to M. Rakovsky's prompt denial of the authenticity of the Letter, prominent leaders in the Tory and Liberal Parties rushed in to the field with praise

for the *Daily Mail*, which claimed credit for the "exposure"; and stories, no doubt derived from the same reliable source, that the Letter had been lying about for a month, hidden, and intended to be kept hidden, by the Prime Minister and his colleagues. The Letter was published on the 25th, Saturday. On that day Lord Birkenhead, Lord Curzon, Sir W. Joynson Hicks, Mr Churchill, Sir A. Mond, Sir R. Horne and Mr Amery made impassioned speeches on the Letter, and in varying tones declared that the Prime Minister was ruined and disgraced and the election settled. Lord Birkenhead proclaimed that it was "owing to the enterprise of the *Daily Mail* that the document became known." "They alone of English newspapers became aware of this document." When did they know of it? Lord Birkenhead, after stating categorically that it was not a forgery, said "he had reason to suppose that the letter from Zinoviev was dispatched by private messenger to a member of the British Communist Party, and it was reasonable to assume that it would be received in this country by 21st or 22nd September." This "reasonable assumption" immediately became a fact—Mr MacDonald, the ex-Chancellor declared, had had the Letter for a month. Lord Curzon likewise stormed on to the platform on the Saturday



evening, and at Leicester used almost identical phrases : the Government had known about the Letter for a month, but if the *Daily Mail* had not got hold of it and published it, "we should never have heard of it." Mr Churchill and Sir A. Mond were equally specific about their month and equally violent in their denunciations. Mr Amery asked whether the document had been published to "avoid a still more damaging exposure"; Sir Robert Horne declared, forthright, that "nothing but compulsion would have induced the Government to reveal this letter."

On the enterprise of the *Mail* in securing the Letter a good deal more light requires to be shed than has yet been vouchsafed. They, it seems, had the original, the Foreign Office only a copy. Where is that original now? How and when and whence did they get it? And why, if they got their Letter on 22nd September, did they hold it up till three days before the Poll?

The alleged "hold-up" by the Foreign Office was the gravamen of the Tory charge. Their case really depended on that, for the Foreign Office Note was stern and minatory enough even to please them. The case on this, assiduously and quite unscrupulously piled up between 26th and 30th October, has since been blown out of the water by Mr Chamberlain. On 15th Decem-



ber, speaking as Foreign Secretary in the House, he stated explicitly :

“ If we have a complaint it is not of delay on the part of the right hon. gentleman. Given the circumstances of the time, which were those of an Election, there was, I think, no delay on the part of the right hon. gentleman in dealing with the document which came before him. Nobody could doubt that.”

That is on 15th December. No such word was uttered before : even after Mr MacDonald had spoken at Cardiff on the 27th, charges of treacherous delay, of “ bottling up ” (Mr Chamberlain’s own phrase, used on 29th October) went on being levelled against him, Mr Baldwin and Mr Lloyd George joining in the chorus. As a matter of fact the Foreign Office acted with remarkable promptitude. The mythical “ month ” had no sort of existence in fact. The Cabinet knew nothing of the Letter—it was not there for them to know. Instead of arriving, as alleged by Lords Birkenhead, Curzon & Co., at the Foreign Office on the 21st or 22nd of September, it was formally received there on 10th October (the day after the defeat of the Government) and registered on the 14th. If the *Daily Mail* got its copy on 21st or 22nd September, it was at least three weeks ahead of the Foreign Office and even longer ahead of Mr MacDonald. It was not till the 16th, at

Manchester, that he was aware of its existence. From the 14th to the 25th is eleven days—not a fortnight, still less a month. Nevertheless the charge of holding up was continued by responsible ex-Ministers of the Crown after Mr MacDonald had given this perfectly definite time-table in his speech at Cardiff.

For a very plain reason. The frightened elector was to know that there was a plot to blow everything up: not that it had been stamped upon.

The charges of treachery, incompetence, delay, and so on, did not exhaust the utility and beauty of the incident, however, from an electioneering point of view. It had the merit of a really good scare; it cut both ways. One paragraph, at any rate, in the Note seemed fatal to the Treaties; yet the Party and its Chief stood on the Treaties, nor did they recede a jot from that position. While the Tories and their Liberal allies concentrated on the Letter and on denunciation of Mr MacDonald for holding it up, and hardly referred to the Note except to point out that the Foreign Office had made an end of the Treaties, the Note spread dismay among the Labour ranks and those Liberals engaged in "straight" fights. The Letter they could, and most of them did, denounce as a forgery: the Note was more difficult to handle in an atmosphere

already surcharged with anti-Bolshevik terrors. Not Foreign Office slowness but Foreign Office speed in determining that the Letter was genuine, and the Soviet Government a tool of the Third International, appalled and upset them. Plot psychology invaded their minds : what they saw was a conspiracy in the Foreign Office, the hotbed of reaction, designed to destroy its Chief and them at the eleventh hour. That the Labour voter stood staunch is a remarkable tribute to his education and good sense.

Mr MacDonald spoke at Cardiff and at three other meetings in his constituency on the 27th, Monday. The report, of course, only came out on the 28th, the day before the poll. Between the 25th and the 28th candidates had to say something, and did not know what to say. They did not run away from the Treaties : there was no question of that, and Mr MacDonald's speech gave a straight lead on the point ; but very few, at the time, knew, beyond that, quite where they were ; fewer still could join together, in the nerve storms of the eve of the poll, a story of a kind a jumpy electorate could appreciate. Somewhere there seemed to be a dropped clue : there was no time to discover it.

To-day a careful perusal of the Note and a careful collation of it with Mr MacDonald's

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speeches on the 27th disclose a sequence that leaves little mystery and nothing sinister—save the share of the *Daily Mail*, and its exploitation by party managers. That sequence is worth setting out, since irrelevancies accumulate so quickly, even on matters of present-day controversy, that their true outlines disappear.

First a time-table. On 8th October the Labour Government was defeated in the House of Commons on the Liberal Vote of Censure demanding an inquiry into the Campbell case. On Thursday, 9th October, Mr MacDonald, who had seen the King, announced at the Labour Party Conference at the Queen's Hall that the Government did not propose to remain under the harrow until they were again defeated on the Russian Treaties, but to appeal to the country: a General Election would take place on 30th October. There was, of course, no Cabinet meeting after the 9th. On the morning of the 13th he went up to Glasgow, and from then until the 22nd was perpetually on the move. After his motor tour he arrived in Aberavon late on the 17th. On the 19th he was in Retford, on the 20th in Leicester, on the 21st in Sheffield and Bristol, returning to Aberavon on the 22nd. At Manchester, on the 16th, he received from the Foreign Office and saw for the first time a copy of the Zinoviev Letter. This

had been, he was informed, formally received by the Foreign Office on the 10th, but not registered there until the 14th, after he had left London. It is hardly necessary to point out that, until registered, documents have no official existence. When he received it on the morning of the 16th in Manchester, Mr MacDonald "minuted that the greatest care would have to be taken in discovering whether the letter was authentic or not." If authentic it should be published. In the meantime, while investigations into authenticity were going on, a draft letter to M. Rakovsky was to be prepared for Mr MacDonald's consideration.

On the 21st a trial draft was dispatched from the Foreign Office to Aberavon. Mr MacDonald was away and did not receive the draft till he returned there. On the 23rd he considered it—

"I looked at the draft. I altered it, and sent it back in an altered form, *expecting it to come back to me again with proofs of authenticity.*"<sup>1</sup>

It reached the Foreign Office on the morning of the 24th, not initialled, because he expected to receive it back again, with those proofs of the authenticity of the document on which its issue depended. On the one hand, he was familiar with Third International literature, and the use

<sup>1</sup> Cardiff, 27th October.

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made of it, and therefore indisposed to take a mere copy of a document of this type *au pied de la lettre* ; on the other hand, he took a very strong view about the stopping of propaganda. From either point of view certainty was all-important. He was not convinced then, he is, as he said in the House of Commons on 15th December, not convinced now, that this particular document was authentic. He needed proof before he could act.

What happened ? The rough draft with his amendments reached the Foreign Office on the morning of the 24th.

“ Instead of sending this back to me in a fair copy for my signature, they sent it out themselves on the night of the 24th to the newspapers.”<sup>1</sup>

That is to say, instead of receiving the redrafted Note in fair copy, with the proofs of authenticity necessary before its dispatch in final form to M. Rakovsky (that being the form of publication intended), Mr MacDonald, like every one else, opened his newspaper on the 25th to read an “ Election Bombshell ”—the Red Letter, accompanied by an “ angry Foreign Office Note ” signed “ in the absence of the Secretary of State.”

Later in the day (the 25th) he spoke at Swansea,

<sup>1</sup> Porthcawl, 27th October.



but could not refer to the Note and Letter because, as he explained on the 27th,

“I was out of London and I had to get information on Saturday afternoon, and information was still coming in.” He was, in fact, on that Saturday, as much in the dark as any other candidate. Between his dispatch of the non-initialled trial draft on the 23rd and its publication in the morning papers of the 25th, he had heard nothing.

At this point it will be well, in order to reconstruct what happened, to look at this Note which Mr MacDonald expected to see back, but which appeared in the press of the 25th. Observe first the expression he used (at Kenfig Hill on the 27th) to describe what he did :—

“I knocked it into smithereens and wrote something with my own hand, which I wanted to see back, and therefore I did not initial it.”

It is matter of common knowledge that his method at the Foreign Office was to cause a preliminary draft to be made for him. On this he worked, over and over, until by a process of insertion and omission a satisfactory form emerged. Cases are reported where drafts went through five and six revisions. Journalists who have had copy of his through their hands will recall manuscripts defaced with innumerable alterations and inserted paragraphs, only made bearable by the neat

regularity of the writing. A special peculiarity is that where others score out a paragraph of which they disapprove, he leaves it to stand, as a sort of reminder, and for the convenience of having all his material, rejected and accepted, together before him on the sheet on which he works. This trick I noted specially when once working with him on a committee which had to knock a draft constitution into shape : an offending paragraph was left in a copy supposed to be completely overhauled. " I leave it there to remind me of a point I want to fight," he said. The insignificant incident stayed in my mind and came back when I studied the Note ; it is indeed the one personal contribution I can make to its elucidation, not available to others who read it carefully. As it is, the Note contains ample internal evidence that it is not a finished draft. The first four paragraphs are more or less consistent. But with paragraph 5, it starts again on a new and different line, incompatible with them. The discrepancy is at once apparent if paragraph 3 and paragraph 5 are set out side by side.

3. No one who understands the constitution and the relationships of the Communist International will doubt its *intimate connection and contact with the Soviet Government*. No

5. Moreover, in the Treaty which His Majesty's Government recently concluded with your Government still further provision was made for the faithful execution of an an-

Government will ever tolerate an arrangement with a foreign Government by which the latter is in formal diplomatic relations of a correct kind with it, whilst at the same time a propagandist body *organically connected with that foreign Government* encourages and even orders subjects of the former to plot and plan revolutions for its overthrow. Such conduct is not only a grave departure from the rules of international comity, but a violation of specific and solemn undertakings repeatedly given to His Majesty's Government.

alogous undertaking which is essential to the existence of good and friendly relations between the two countries.

His Majesty's Government mean that these undertakings shall be carried out both in the letter and in the spirit, and it cannot accept the contention that whilst the Soviet Government undertakes obligations a *political body, as powerful as itself*, is to be allowed to conduct a propaganda and support it with money which is in direct violation of the official agreement.

The Soviet Government either has or has not the power to make such agreements. If it has the power it is its duty to carry them out and see that the other parties are not deceived. *If it has not this power, and if responsibilities which belong to the State in other countries are in Russia in the keeping of private and irresponsible bodies*, the Soviet Government ought not to make agreements which it knows it cannot carry out.

Paragraph 3 assumes, indeed states, that there is an "*intimate connection and contact*" between the Third International and the Soviet Government. They are "*organically connected.*" Paragraph 5, on the other hand, makes no such assumption. On the contrary, it suggests not connection or control, but the existence, side by side, of two separate and competing organisations. The Third International is "*as powerful as*" the Soviet Government, but it is "*a private and irresponsible body*" usurping "responsibilities which in other countries belong to the State." The conflict of description is striking.

Nor does the conflict end here. Paragraph 3 threatens. In language neither very clear nor wholly grammatical, with a confusion of "latter's" and "former's," alien to Mr MacDonald's definite style, it makes general statements as to what "no Government" will "ever tolerate," and proceeds to accuse the Russian Government forthright of "violating solemn undertakings." Contrast paragraph 5—"His Majesty's Government means that the undertakings" (explained in the previous sentence as mutual arrangements "essential to the existence of good and friendly relations between the two countries") "shall be carried out both in the letter and the spirit." Whereas paragraph 3 suggests a breakdown in the Treaty, paragraph 5 expressly reiterates its continuity and necessity.

The more closely paragraph 5 is studied the more irresistible is the conclusion both from style and substance that it was, and paragraph 3 was not, written by Mr MacDonald. Is it not also clear that paragraph 5 represents his indication for the *redrafting of the Note*? It certainly knocks paragraph 3 into "smithereens," and answers to the description of "something written in my own hand which I wanted to see back," to which he referred in his speech at Kenfig Hill on the 27th. It breathes a spirit different, and states a view of facts at once different from, and irreconcilable with, the earlier paragraphs to which it is discordantly attached. Paragraph 5 asks questions which M. Rakovsky might answer. Paragraph 3 makes statements to which an answer is hardly conceivable except in the form of a rupture. Paragraph 5, though firm, is not—paragraph 3 is—an ultimatum. Paragraph 5 implies that the Treaties stand; paragraph 3 makes that assumption almost impossible.

Anyone else, after writing 5, would have scored through 3; but with his curious economy Mr MacDonald apparently left it. It might, when he saw it again, suggest something to him, if only something to avoid. Perhaps it did.

How far it was from his intention to allow the incident to break his purpose of making peace

with Russia a subsequent passage in the same speech at Kenfig Hill shows.

“The question is how does this affect the Russian Treaty? Orders, they say, have been issued to our candidates that they must stop referring to these things. Have you got them? No, and you never will. . . . The incident will do this. It will show both sides that agreements ought to be kept. If Russia requires any proof of this she is getting it now. If Russia pledges herself we shall expect Russia to carry out her pledge to the letter and in the spirit of the letter, and at the same time reciprocally we will give Russia fair-play. It is no use talking about Russia in ingrained temper and in inflamed passion. Russia is there. Unless we can manage somehow or other to become *friendly*, unless we can convince each other of *mutual goodwill*, then you can put Foreign Secretaries into office to make peace, but there will be no peace. You can send Foreign Secretaries and Prime Ministers to Geneva to try and arrange machinery for removing the causes of war and producing disarmament, but with Russia out there will be no removal of the causes of war and no adequate disarmament for the rest of the nations of Europe. One of the most important and essential tasks of a Foreign Secretary at the present time is to come to some arrangement with Russia that will make Russia an ardent co-operator and not a pariah nation on the edge of European culture.”

This passage of itself suggests that paragraph 5, and not paragraph 3, represents the sort of Note he would have sent to M. Rakovsky, even after he had been convinced that the Red Letter was genuine. It should not be forgotten that it was



only after such genuineness had been proved to him that he was prepared to send any Note at all ; and on the 23rd it had not been. But the first point is the really important one. Even were the Letter authentic, he was to ask M. Rakovsky questions, not to break off negotiations.

A watertight and honourable agreement about propaganda was important ; but Mr MacDonald was very far from taking the “ high tragedy ” line about the Red Letter that the Foreign Office officials apparently took. Whether authentic or a forgery, he did not regard the Letter as an *ipso facto* argument for dropping the Treaty. Quite the contrary. It was in the darkened air of exclusion and enmity that propaganda and any and every other evil associated with Bolshevism flourished. The way to make them innocuous was mutual frankness, honesty, and goodwill—the method so successfully employed to sweeten Anglo-French and Franco-German relations. That, as always, was the major tactic : stress on the loyal suspension of propaganda was a subsidiary part of the effort to create good mutual relations. Therefore, after publication, as before, he stood for the Treaties, and for mutual pledges and fair-play. Precisely because his purpose of making peace with Russia was inalterable, because he was not going to budge from the Treaties, he did not, on the

16th or on the 23rd, regard this matter of the Zinoviev Letter as of overwhelming importance. To-day, after the bombshell of the 25th, after the immense effect actually produced by publication, in the highly charged atmosphere of an election, it seems strange that he did not take the whole thing more seriously ; did not, for instance, foresee how dangerous the back-firing was likely to be—to his peace effort, to his Party, and to himself. After the event, it is easy to be wise. Probably he was too little attentive to the possible reactions of other people. He was not going to be deflected from an understanding with Russia ; and his own point of view, as so often, sufficed for him.

Return now to the draft that was received in London on the morning of the 24th ; the draft which should have come back, but instead went to the press with all its imperfections on its head. The inaccuracy of the *Times* account (quoted on p. 140) is now plain enough. The Foreign Secretary had not been “convinced of the authenticity of the document,” nor had he given “the order to make the document and the reply public.” Nor can the final sentence stand which states that—

“The Prime Minister though not in London was kept informed of every development and approved the action taken.”

Between dispatching the draft on the night of the 23rd and reading it in the papers on the 25th he knew nothing.

What must have happened is plain. The details may be obscure. The main outline is clear. Faced presumably with the knowledge that the *Mail* was about to publish the Letter, the officials at the Foreign Office must have decided to forestall it by themselves publishing both the Letter and the Note in the press of the 25th, without consulting or communicating with the Foreign Secretary, although he was accessible by wire or telephone, and there was time to do so, since they published in the morning, not the evening papers. Easy to say now this decision was wrong; easier still to see that it was a decision not for them to make. Better perhaps to imitate the generosity of the Chief to whom, blindly, they had dealt a deadly blow.

“That night it was published. (Cries of ‘Shame.’) *I make no complaints.* I will tell you why. The Foreign Office and every official in it know my views about propaganda. The Foreign Office and every one of my colleagues in the Government know that I will not tolerate this propaganda. (Cheers.) They all know that as soon as I get anything authentic, anything that is trustworthy, I will communicate it to the public without delay, so that you may know. (Loud cheers.) On account of my known determination to stand firm by agreements and to treat them as Holy Writ when

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my signature has been attached to them, *they assumed that they were carrying out my wishes* in taking immediate steps to publish the whole affair. *They honestly believed that the document was authentic, and upon that belief they acted.*"<sup>1</sup>

If any further proof be required, it is to be derived from Mr MacDonald's subsequent silence. The obligation of loyalty is absolute ; not dependent upon or affected by another's loyalty to you, least of all when the spirit of his loyalty has not failed, though his judgment may have done. In his view—he has made this abundantly clear—there was no failure of spirit in the Foreign Office. On the contrary, "They assumed that they were carrying out my wishes." Confirmation of this was given by his endorsement of Mr Chamberlain's statement in the House of Commons on 15th December.

"Mr CHAMBERLAIN.—I accept for myself, and I hope my friends will accept, what I understand to be his view of the actual publication—that there was a misunderstanding between the officials and himself, unfortunate, but——

"Lieut.-Commander KENWORTHY.—Fortunate for you.

"Mr CHAMBERLAIN.—I hope the hon. and gallant Member will restrain himself. This is a matter which is really much more between the right hon. gentleman and me than between the hon. and gallant Member and me, and in which, at any rate, my object is, before I go

<sup>1</sup> Cardiff, 27th October.

further on this question, to do full justice to the right hon. gentleman, and to prevent controversy arising on a point on which I think it would be, not only grossly unjust to individuals, but gravely injurious to the public service. I know that the right hon. gentleman has never suggested, and I understand that he will, at any moment, be ready to deny, that there was ever any suspicion in his mind that any subordinate of his at the Foreign Office ever tried to do other than serve him with the loyalty and devotion that is the proud boast of our Civil Service——

“MR RAMSAY MACDONALD.—Hear, hear——

“MR CHAMBERLAIN.—and a precious possession of our national life.

“MR WALLHEAD.—I do not believe that.

“MR DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr James Hope).—I must ask the hon. gentleman not to interrupt.

“MR CHAMBERLAIN.—It is sufficient for me that the right hon. gentleman, the late Prime Minister, says that he entirely accepts that statement of his position, and I say, on my part, that I, in the same spirit, accept his words when he says that there was misunderstanding, and that he had not intended the letter to be published.

“MR RAMSAY MACDONALD.—The despatch.

“MR CHAMBERLAIN.—I have said that he had not sanctioned the publication of the letter.

“MR RAMSAY MACDONALD.—I do not want the two things confused—the Zinoviev letter and the despatch to M. Rakovsky.

“MR CHAMBERLAIN.—The right hon. gentleman had not sanctioned the despatch to M. Rakovsky.”

In his own speech later in the same Debate (15th December), Mr MacDonald underlined what Mr Chamberlain had said. There had been

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a misunderstanding about the issue of the Note to M. Rakovsky, but

“For anyone to suggest that that misunderstanding was caused by anything which should be regarded by the hottest or most prejudiced man as having been deliberately disloyal or even amounting to a shadow of disloyalty, is unfair to a body of men with whom I have worked for eight or nine months, who are not only officials, but friends, whom I hold in profound respect, and than whom, so far as loyalty is concerned, no chief could desire a finer body of supporters.”

The relationship of chief to subordinate is one in which responsibility belongs to the chief. His the praise for success : his the blame for error, wherever committed. To say that a man recognises this loyalty in private life is almost to insult him. *Noblesse oblige*. To insist that principles binding on private should govern public conduct may be expensive to the individual who insists : it is of permanent value to the community or group into whose ideas and conduct it penetrates.

One word may be added on the question of the authenticity of the Letter. Mr MacDonald's own position, as put in this same speech, is “authenticity not proved.” Here, indeed, the darkness is as thick as ever. The Foreign Office, from the first, had a copy, not the original. The officials were convinced of its genuineness. Mr MacDonald was not convinced, either on the



16th when he first saw the Letter, or on the 23rd, when he returned the trial draft of the Note. During that time, he has said, "I never had a particle of evidence, one way or the other, presented to me." The Labour Government, with a promptitude in distinguished contrast to the dilatory tenacity of its predecessor, handed over the Seals on 6th November; the few days between that and the declaration of the polls were occupied in a Cabinet Enquiry into the Letter, barren of results. The new Tory Government set up another Committee; and Mr Chamberlain has declared himself satisfied that the Letter was genuine. The evidence, however, has not been made public. Not having seen it, Mr MacDonald remains, as anyone whose convictions depend upon proof must remain, unconvinced either that the Letter was genuine, or that it was a forgery. Suspicion is not proof, but—

"When the newspaper that had the letter kept it back very cleverly until the period of the election when it could create a maximum psychological effect, without giving an opportunity for a rational dissipation of that effect, my suspicions of its authenticity deepen."

To say that the Letter was perfectly consistent with Third International propaganda proves too much. Easy to construct a convincing imitation from its multifarious pronouncements. Some day, perhaps, the *Mail* will reveal its secrets.

## CHAPTER VII

### RIDDLE-ME-REE

“ I have the village in my blood—I cannot help it—the small collection of thatched houses, the good, open, waste spaces, the honest, bent, trudging fisherwiferies—those quiet, straightforward ladies of low degree, whose manners were perfect and whose characters were unimpeachable.”—Dundee, 9th Sept. 1924.

TEA on the table, a great fire glowing in the hearth, casting wonderful lights up to the high roof, whose cupola held the dark blue of the sky suspended over our heads, as on to the paintings on the walls—the rich colours of Sir Peter Lely, the sombre glow of a Rembrandt, the lovely softness of Reynolds and Raeburn: the scene was peaceful enough. We lay back in deep soft chairs while the Prime Minister adjusted a new record into the pianola. It was Schumann’s “ *Nachtstück* ” for which one of us had asked.

He sat down and was, like us, absorbed in silent enjoyment. Suddenly, from the table behind, the harsh voice of the telephone intruded. With the utmost desire to be tactful,

impossible not to hear and, the knowledge in our heads of "difficulties" on the Evictions Bill, equally impossible not to tremble. It was a Friday afternoon—a unique Friday, for Mr MacDonald, having cleared things up the night before, had, after a specially exhausting week, brought a cold for cure to Chequers late on the Thursday night. A few moments of silence—listening at this end. Then :

"You think it's serious?"

Another long interval of inaudible communication.

"As bad as that?"

Very difficult to attend even to the slow beauty of Schumann, while one asked oneself what new crisis had occurred.

"It appears that this is the last week-end here." The Prime Minister replaced the receiver. "According to Jimmie we're in the soup. . . . Get me Mr Clynes"—this to the operator. "Well—there it is."

He came over to us again.

"It's serious?"

He nodded. Nobody found anything to say: tact seemed to forbid questions. For us, a sort of chill passed over the warm room.

Mr MacDonald had gone over to the pianola, which had run down.

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“I want that thing again: it’s marvellously beautiful.”

He resumed his place, and to all appearance was, for the next five or ten minutes, completely absorbed, concentrated in attention to the music; at its close, ready to discuss with one of us the relative merits of the interpretation we had heard (Carreño) and another, also included in the records. No sign there of any division of attention. Some of us might have an uneasy ear cocked for the next incursion of the telephone. Not so the man concerned. He knew, far better than any of us there did, how serious the crisis was. Nevertheless, he could and did remit it. Nor later, when things developed, when the intelligence conveyed by subsequent long telephone conversations was expanded and confirmed by an M.P. who came down in time for dinner, did he show any sign of fuss. At dinner he talked mainly to Margaret Bondfield, who was to represent the Government at Geneva—“if there still is a Government”—in the next week, about the problems with which she would have to deal there. She had come down for instructions and he gave his full mind to her. After dinner he showed the newcomer some of the marvels of the long gallery and talked of Chequers generally: then, while we sat on,

chatting of the crisis and what it might mean, he retired downstairs. He spent the evening at work on his Foreign Office boxes—was still at them long after we had gone to bed, as again in the morning when we came down to breakfast.

The incident, though trifling, was characteristic. Not industry alone, but concentration and control enabled him to carry his burden—the power of his objective mind to absorb itself in the given thing. With the “crisis” he could not deal from Chequers: there were other things there with which he could and must. With it he should, and knew he could, deal so soon as he got back to London. Time spent on thinking of it till then was wasted. He wastes no time. Many people see the wisdom of that: few are blessed with the power of turning that wisdom into action in little things as in big: shed so few tears over spilt milk, or spend so little energy in discussing the impossible or the hypothetical. Despite his mysticism, perhaps because of his fatalism, he is little interested in the hypothetical.

His silence, on this occasion, inhibited our questions. Had any of us asked, we might have been told. Was it good manners that kept us from asking? Possibly: one hopes so. Partly, however, some quality, hard to analyse, impossible not to feel, in our host. He was not

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mysterious about the affair ; had we asked, he would no doubt have answered ; and yet, somehow, he kept us from asking. This quality in him, whatever it be, that "keeps people from asking," is at the root of much strength and some weakness.

The strength is obvious enough. Indiscretions are prevented ; impertinences kept at arm's length ; leakages do not occur. The record of the Labour Cabinet in that respect is as remarkable as the record of its resistance to "pressure." It proved the most "unsqueezable" Government of modern times. This it owes in the main to its Chief, like the degree to which it was "press-proof." Mr MacDonald gave nothing away ; except for one semi-official interview in the *New Leader*, he was silent himself and imposed silence on his colleagues. There was a stoppage of the "stunting" of the Lloyd George regime. Fleet Street did not like this but had to take it.

The weakness is obvious too. People, including direct personal colleagues, complained that Mr MacDonald told them nothing, that they were in the dark. What they meant was, often, that he prevented them from asking him questions, or from communicating troubles. Had they asked, they would have been told, for he at any rate is seldom in the dark. He knows his own



mind and the facts (not fancies) with which he is dealing. This may not be the usual idea of him; the usual idea is that there corresponds to his "mysteriousness" to others some element of mistiness in his own mind. Not at all. He never "blindly trusts that chance will somehow pull us through." Take electioneering methods. Whereas, in 1922, Mr Snowden won Colne Valley in the dark, Mr MacDonald knew everything there was to know about Aberavon. In Colne Valley there was no canvass; in Aberavon, as in every constituency he has ever fought, his system for working out exact figures on a double canvass basis was a terror to his agent. He left nothing, leaves nothing, to chance. Chance is what may happen to-morrow: he is concerned with what is happening to-day. Ask him a practical question and he will give you an answer. But never expect him to know that the question is lying unuttered in your mind. To do that is to invite disappointment, unintended rebuff. He neither knows nor cares what is in your mind. When you tell him, he may listen, if it joins on to what is in his. If not, he will leave it.

Interest in the other person's mind—that he does not possess. Those who want that will go hungry away. Who does not? Prominent politicians, members of Cabinets, are, after all, much

like other people. They say they want information. What, in nine cases out of ten, they really want is personal attention, sympathy, the warm sense of sharing. Practical co-operation Mr MacDonald no doubt understands ; human co-operation, hardly. Or rather, while understanding, he cannot practise it in detail. The unasked question reverberates in the air ; he does not hear it.

Is it not significant that the one prominent colleague who never felt this chill aloofness was Mr J. H. Thomas ? Mr Thomas, bubbling with his own vitality, encased and protected by his own cheerily expansive personality, could get through any guard, thanks to his blessed unawareness of it. If he had a question on his lips, he would surely put it ; if he had a view to express, he would express it. His own aura was robust enough to make him indifferent to the aura of anyone else. He was not worrying about what the Prime Minister was thinking. How many others had the same immunity ? Ever since he came in to the Party, he has, in this curious sense, been on its nerves. Keir Hardie had something of the same trick, though death has expunged the recollection, and one of the most marked individualities of our time is steadily being reduced by piety to a Merciful Knight in a stained-glass window. But Keir Hardie had

the advantage of being a symbolic target : because every man's hand was against him, his own handful were too busy defending to attack. The dropping, between 1923 and September 1924, of the outside attacks on Mr MacDonald left his own with their nerves to play with. They expressed themselves nine times out of ten in a criticism of his telling them nothing.

From the inside, substantial criticism of his premiership boils down to this. It exasperates by presenting a perpetual riddle. What is it that causes a man whose special gift on the platform is, as Mr Nevinson has put it, his sympathetic imagination, to be in himself isolated, difficult of approach, impenetrable ? Idle to pretend that this, like any other defect, did not have its larger reactions. Authority is an amplifier of every failing. Of this, the trace can be seen in many of the incidents already recorded that led to disaster. Little, for instance, could have been made of the motor car had Mr MacDonald in March told every one about the gift. Every one then would have been delighted. On the Campbell case again, a blunt statement from him to the effect that a mistake had been made in initiating the prosecution would have satisfied most. Had he discussed the arrangements for the speaking tour, and put his foot down definitely about out-

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of-door meetings, much destructive fatigue might have been spared. On the Red Letter, there is a good explanation of his subsequent silence ; he prefers to be blamed himself, rather than to blame others. In connection with this, however, the most difficult aspect of an uncommunicative temper reveals itself in the refusal to admit mistake. Until he was satisfied of the authenticity of the document, it was surely an error to allow so much as a preparatory draft to M. Rakovsky. The question of authenticity, indeed, was so vital that it might even have been wise to hold the matter up until, the election confusion over, it was possible to go thoroughly into it. Whether or no, preparation of a draft, to some extent, prejudged the issue, even though there was no intention of sending a Note until it was cleared. The existence of the draft dug a pit. Anyhow, in the event, it proved so. Certainly, after the election, an admission of bad judgment on that or any other point would have melted reproaches into devotion. Mr MacDonald has said, in general, "We have made mistakes." Has he ever said, in particular, "I made a mistake ?" On one occasion only he got near it. The chairman at the St Pancras Working Men's Club reunion, on 20th December, remarked that his defeat was only temporary.

“Human charity,” said the ex-Premier, “could go no further than that.” This, however, was not a Labour gathering. If he, on this or any other disputed matter, could take his own people into his confidence, ask them to share his burdens and understand his difficulties, and so appeal to the warm generosity there is in them and the eager desire to comprehend, he would have them at his feet. The injustice of their surface reproaches ought not to hide from him the unhappiness that thus expresses itself; it does, because he hears their words, and will not look below them into their hearts. He has taken defeat with dignity; why is the human touch lacking in this very human creature?

If one could answer that, one would be at the heart of the riddle. A suggestion may be ventured. Among the few direct statements he has ever made about himself is Mr MacDonald’s assertion that he is a very simple character. Nobody believes him. Yet perhaps it is the truth. Because there is a great deal of him, and a great deal that is not understood, it is assumed by those whom he puzzles that he puzzles himself; that the analysis in which they indulge he indulges. Need that, however, be the case? Do not the pieces begin to fit together if, on the contrary, one starts from the assumption that he does not think about him-

self ; that he takes himself for granted, as he takes other people ; that, in a word, he is simple—as a child is simple ?

The problem is, really, the same as that presented to every grown-up who loves a child. Do any of us understand him ? Can we recreate for ourselves his self-contained, undivided world, or penetrate the secret of his still concentration ? Are any of us not hurt, again and again, by the queer limits of his attention, by his serene absorption in his own games, the detached, unseeing eye with which he looks through our interrupting presence, his apparent oblivion of us, his possession of a world of his own from which we are excluded ? Is it not very much the same with Mr MacDonald ?

If one accepts the implications of simplicity, one is carried a long way, if not towards understanding, at least towards that correct picture or symbol which sets limits to bewilderment. The analytical mind is perhaps prevented, by its very composition, by the impulse in and of itself which makes it seek to understand, from understanding the simple. But with an adequate effort, it can *see* the simple. So, in the given case. If one can for a moment separate the human being in him from the statesman, politician, artist, who, in their combination, make up his character, one can find in that human



being all the traits of a child—a beautiful, gifted, at times infinitely tiresome, child. Take his concentration. Where except in a child does one find such a complete power to shut out everything and every one, combined with such incapacity or unwillingness to explain what he is doing, while he is doing it? You may admire the result, as you may admire the castle the child has built with his bricks: never get him to explain on what plan he is building, or induce him to allow you to help. He seems, indeed, to be working on no plan; relying serenely on an instinct which somehow or other will bring him out at the right place. Is not this true even of Mr MacDonald's foreign policy? Retrospectively his plan can be seen: but while he was working at it how much did he explain? Was not the friction with colleagues attributable to this? Were not the problems of the Russian Treaty increased by the other side of this same trait—the inattention of the concentrated mind to things other than the special one on which he is himself engaged? Or again, take the Red Letter. There may be, as has been suggested, good reasons for not illuminating some vital details; but the difficulty in the Party could be mitigated by a frank statement on his part of the fact that such reasons exist, and removed by an admission of error. He will not do either,

any more than will the child, incomprehensibly accused. He shuts his mouth and goes on with his own affairs. To try to enter and meet the mind of the questioner simply does not occur to him. Concentration, of course, produces a sort of void round the person so concentrated : creates a kind of impenetrable ring of mist between him and others. This phenomenon is mentioned again and again in memoirs of Napoleon as a matter of profound concern to his officers and entourage. His mind moved right away from theirs and contact could not be established. They did not know where he was ; they could get neither attention nor instructions. This solution of contact was the great theme of recrimination after Leipzig. Some of the things said by unhappy marshals are exactly what are being said now by unhappy candidates and Members of Parliament.

For the child the not-self only vaguely exists. He looks at his nurse, even at his parents, with alien unseeing eyes at times. Every friend of Mr MacDonald's must at some time or another have met this unseeing eye ; experienced the chill of going into his room (on invitation ; there are only two people known to have made a practice of walking in unexpected and unasked) and being looked at, if looked at at all, as though not there.

Sitting at his desk he goes on writing or reading. When at last he lifts his eyes, they perhaps see but as often as not do not focus you. You feel like a blurred outline on a dissolving negative. His words might be addressed to anyone in the world as aptly as to you : of you, as a " simple, separate person," he appears to have no sense. Try as you will, you cannot get your personality across ; are lucky if you can secure enough of his attention for the words you utter (which are not those you wished to use) to reach him. In proportion, it seems, as what you have to say is important, is his unreadiness to realise it, his readiness to shift to any other matter of his own, his ingenuity in putting you off. It is not ingenuity really ; it is merely his congenital child-like inability to accept the reality of another person. He may, on occasion, talk of what is in his mind ; he shows no more interest in what is in yours than a child does.

This want of interest, this inability to focus, to get them into the picture, hurts people the more that with the child's insensible self-centredness he has the child's charm. No one who saw him at Lancaster House receiving the foreign delegates, ambassadors, etc., can forget the impression of a truly royal dignity and courtesy, of fine tact, and genuine graciousness. He is invariably gracious

either as host or Chief, with a graciousness in which there is no hint of condescension. His consideration for servants is unfailing. This, however, is not the equality of mutual interest that belongs to friendship, to comradeship. The child at a party has locked away his own little world and speaks and moves, for the time being, in the unreal painted world of grown-ups. He can be charming to everybody, because nobody is asking to be let in through the closed door or presenting any passport to his own. Mr MacDonald's famous charm is irresponsible and plays over all and sundry in the same way : no more than the curly-headed little boy or girl can he be called to account for it. He engages affection too easily to seem to value it. There are countless people in and out of the movement whom he hurts in exact ratio to their affection : the more they care, the more lacerated are they by their apparent unreality to him. They suffer because they cannot help trying to understand him, and, vainer still, trying to get him to understand them ; if they could take his affection for granted, as he takes theirs, or as they would take a child's, all might be well. Affection is there ; there are countless instances on record of unswerving loyalty and unforgetting kindness to old associates, their children and their kith and kin ; but it seems to have little or nothing to do

with the persons to whom it is given. In absence, his friends may be the object of his tenderness : present, they can hardly ever feel that they are the subject of his observation. Catastrophe, severe misfortune, or death will unlock reserves of delicately discriminating feeling ; no one ever wrote or spoke juster obituary notices ; but the shock of disaster seems required to release them. It is not that he says unkind things ; he very rarely does ; he says nothing, and apparently sees nothing ; and since friendship, for most people, is a mutual relation, this density, inattention, or whatever one calls it, prevents those whom he refuses to see from seeing him. Again, like a child, he knows his own by a sort of instinct. In relation to groups this instinct serves him well, and he can get into touch without any difficulty ; but what must be called his want of interest in individuals amounts at times to a stupidity which, for them, is not mitigated by his intelligence in every other direction. They mind it, in proportion as they are intelligent themselves. They feel that he exercises the privileges of a child without its excuses.

In what is being said about him he is not interested. His own opinion suffices. Had he, for instance, realised that the impression of himself conveyed to the public was his great asset

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and the Labour Party's great asset, he might have steeled himself against unworthy attack, maintained and exploited a nobility of disregard. For such wisdom he was far too simple. Too simple, in the first place, to conceive of his own character as a thing interesting in itself to other people ; too simple, in the second, to assume an attitude ; too simple, in the third, to appreciate the complicated psychology in which he was innocently involved. The child, absorbed in his own play, will go on almost indefinitely, taking no notice of what is passing round him, deaf to what people are saying. Then, suddenly, his absorption broken by some odd word or movement, he will, blindly, and for no good reason, hit out. His elders then are shocked and punish him without in the least appreciating what happened. So, at Barry, Mr MacDonald hit out. So, he is now being punished.

Mr Chesterton once said that the romantic artist's secret was his undimmed sense of wonder, his retention of the child's power to see things for the first time. This secret Mr MacDonald possesses. Wherever he goes he can see with his own eyes ; on whatever he speaks, he brings something fresh and individual to his audience. Could anything be more difficult than an Empire Day message ? The theme invites the most devas-



tating commonplaces. He sent the following (24th May 1924) :—

“We have listened to the greetings of the Commonwealth Premiers with great pleasure and keen interest, and we send them in return our thanks and greetings from the Homeland. The parent tree is still green and the sap of high endeavour still swells in its branches. In the generations that have gone we have launched our exploring ships on many a venturesome voyage, and to-day our people, our institutions, our traditions, and our methods are to be found all over the earth. Our days of voyaging are not over. The world of mind and idea lies around us in unexplored tracts more vast by far than this earth was to our seamen, and the Commonwealth of Nations centring in this Motherland still hears the call to go out in an Elizabethan spirit of gallantry and doughtiness in search of liberty, justice, and peace.”

As Premier he spoke to architects, to civil servants, to teachers, to doctors, to artists, to scientists, and, in every case, spoke living words vitally connected with ideas. Always he brought with him the revealing eye. Nor does the visionary gleam blind him to the actual. Thus, while he appealed to the Free Churchmen at Brighton to systematise the “ideas upon which life depends” and apply the “Sunday mind” to the conditions of business, when receiving the Freedom of the City of Glasgow he reminded his fellow-burgesses of “the deep tragic human note of Glasgow,” always heard by him as he went through the city. Again and

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again too, recollections of the child's dream gave poetry and force to his descriptions, added zest to the adventure of government. He recalled it at Dundee :

“ And in those days we saw as it were over the rim of our world a great world of which we could only dream. That world was studded with cities of power, cities of affluence, cities with harbours, Lord Provosts, and dignified feasts and majestic demeanours. We did not know if ever we would see them, but among them were London and Glasgow and Edinburgh and Dundee, and we dreamed of them—we saw them built against the sky of our visions.”

In the same spirit he approached and understood the dream of nationality. Like the best internationalists he is an ardent nationalist, and his Scottish patriotism, far from excluding, makes him able to express the patriotism of Welshman, Englishman, or Irishman.

“ We have our quarrels, but there is something mysteriously attractive, something that is below and above and beyond all quarrels, and that is the sense of a common nationhood, a common love for a country, a people, a tradition, a kinship. So Ireland, even to those of us who spend far too much of our time in politics, is something more than a political problem. Ireland is a culture, a tradition ; Ireland is glorious with influence in religion, in art, in poetry, in folk-song. Ireland is a special embodiment of the freedom of the human soul when it is engaged in worshipping something that is worthy.”

Thanks more to this underlying simplicity of his than to any other quality, Mr MacDonald has a hold no other politician of our time possesses on the mind and feeling of the simple. His intellectual subtlety has never separated him from them ; changes of the worldly wind have not affected them or him. They have something for him ; he has something for them that belongs to the fundamental in both. Speaking on 20th December, on the occasion of the Old Students' Supper at the St Pancras Working Men's College, he asked some questions about education that indicated this plainly enough.

“What is the educated man? Certainly not the learned man ; certainly not the University man, though he is not debarred by any means. The educated man is a man with certain subtle, spiritual qualities which make him calm in adversity, happy when alone, just in his dealings, rational and sane in the fullest meaning of that word in all the affairs of his life.

“The most educated man I know is a man who finds it very difficult to sign his own name. You will meet him on the hillside if you wander where I sometimes wander in a country of rich historical memories, singing not the most recent songs that London audiences of certain places hear, but singing the old folk-songs that were sung by men who had to sing because if they had not sung their very hearts would have burst, songs of love, of natural beauty, of romance.

“I have sat by him on the hillside, and he has talked to me about his sheep and his dogs, and he has quoted

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Burns, as thousands of men have quoted him, but the difference is this, that he felt every word, and every line he quoted. They were not driven into his memory from the pages of a book, but the things he found in those pages revealed to him his own mind."

These things are the compensations and rewards of the simple. If his simplicity has cost him dear with the vocal section of the community, the "glorified fisherman," as he called himself once when speaking at Lossiemouth, has an unshaken grip on the far larger speechless section. They do not ask to understand; they give their affection to "ane of their ain."

## CHAPTER VIII

### PROSPECT

“However substantially man may build the houses where he shelters his body, his mind, like a Bedouin, will dwell only in tents which it strikes with the morning light.”—*Socialism, Critical and Constructive*, 1921.

ROUND Mr MacDonald the election created a cloud. The obscuration was designed. The sheer bewilderment accompanying the Red Letter caused it to blur for a moment the mind of his own Party, and spread a curious unhappiness, like an unlocated toothache, along its nerves. With most this blur soon passed off. It was no more than the dimming of a glass by a passing breath from outside. The small section that, bringing past grievances to reinforce immediate discomforts, rushed to find a scapegoat, was never representative.

Such a section is, by the nature of the case, always there. Men who are, afterwards, heroes and prophets, whose images are enskied and sainted, have invariably, in their time, to meet criticism and belittlement. Unheard amid the

general applause of success, it becomes loud when temporary set-backs cause a silence. In proportion as a leader stands out above his fellows, he is exposed. Every reverse is attributed to faults or peculiarities of his. The fact that, at any time, he no more than any other human being is wholly comprehensible to those associated with him, aggravated as it is by those very variations from the normal which belong to what we vaguely call "greatness," becomes an offence to the normal, which takes to stones as implements of expression. Instinctively that normal seeks to reduce all things to its own level, to measure all by its own footrule, to blame all that it does not comprehend. "What god," said Carlyle, "ever carried it with the Ten-Pound Franchisers ? in Open Vestry or with any Sanhedrim of considerable standing ? When was a god found 'agreeable' to everybody ? The regular way is to hang, kill, crucify your gods and execrate and trample them under your stupid hoofs for a century or two." He was speaking of Cromwell, Mr MacDonald's special hero, with whose spirit he may well have found himself in close communion at Chequers, where hangs the sword he used at Marston Moor and sleeps the wonderful life-mask which alone of extant portraits gives a true impression of the tragic greatness of the Protector. Cromwell had to wait, through cen-



tures, for just appraisal of work that his own time seemed to have completely wiped off the slate.

If, to-day, Mr MacDonald has to meet some criticism and more puzzlement in his own Party, that in itself indicates mainly that defeat, however temporary, unsettles nerves and makes people desire to find someone else to blame for it. It does not imply any deeper change in the mind of "his own" to whom he is known. They are perfectly aware that he is the finest instrument for Socialist transformation Britain has produced, and, for that reason, the target of concentrated attack from without. Could his ascendancy over Labour be shaken, a much greater victory than that of 30th October 1924 would have been secured. It has not been shaken. It is not likely to be shaken. It is based upon knowledge, and knowledge extending over a long period of time.

So far as the public is concerned, understanding of the facts, whether in relation to special scares like the Campbell case and the Red Letter, or on the broader ground of the Labour Government's work, will cause a reaction in his favour in which there must be a painful element of admitted ingratitude. People will see not only that injustice was meted out, but that they shared in it. Then, their anger will be turned from the victim against

the authors of injustice. External events will reinforce this view, from another angle.

The first Labour Government is a fact, and a fact of lasting importance in our history. "No man steps twice into the same river." Deeper and more lasting currents than we can now see have been started in the waters that move beneath the foam. Certain prejudices have been removed, certain ideas established, certain solid gains secured. Labour does not occupy the place it did in 1923, but one at once more arduous and, thanks to the risk bravely taken, more solid and secure. It has passed out of the glamour of the untried into the hard light of the practical. It has both learned and taught in the interim. For that teaching and that learning it has mainly to thank Mr MacDonald.

Now, that brief episode over, the world is, tragically, reverting to the old ways in a fashion and with a speed that will show his achievement in colours enhanced by contrast. Work speaks, in the long run, though for a time it may seem to be obliterated. Blameless he, of course, is not. He has defects, and authority cast a high light on them as well as on his qualities. His incapacity to communicate, his inaccessibility to colleagues, his imperfect power of delegation, his inaptitude for direct statement, his mysterious reserve, helped

to produce a dangerous isolation. He has paid for it, and the Party with him. At the same time, the simplicity which exposed him to attack, like the dignity of his subsequent reticence, while they contribute a weakness at the moment, are elements in a lasting hold. Held responsible for every disappointment, he has been reproached freely. He has reproached no one in return.

In November he spent ten days in the West country. While away he wrote an article, published in *Forward* of 6th December, which, with the survey of "Continuity in Foreign Policy" in the *Spectator* of the same date, constitute his sole incursion into print between the polls and the end of the year. "After the Battle" will tell the reader who has the circumstances in mind more about the man who wrote it than pages of dissection could do, and cast a clearer light upon his future.

"Sometimes one must flee from familiar things and faces and voices, from the daily round and the common task, because one's mind becomes like a bit of green grass too much trod upon. It has to be protected and nursed, and it has to be let alone. Then give me the hill road, the bleating of sheep, the clouds, the sun and the rain, the graves of dead races, the thatched roofs of living ones, a pipe and a fire when the day is closing, and a clean bed to lie upon until the sun calls in the morning. If friends fail, the hill road never does.

When you are up it never flatters ; it has no grievances if not put in a Cabinet, and its ruts are not made in revenge ; when you are down it does not attribute its misfortunes to you. It is your loyal friend always, and by its own cheery equality sweetens and freshens all your sanities. There is nothing in faithfulness like to it, and blessed is the man who has found it. It puts him above the fickleness of fate and of men.

. . . . .  
“The battle was over, and unable to put up boards announcing for my protection that “Trespassers will be prosecuted,” or “Keep off the grass till it gets a rest,” like my forbears I took to the hills and the moors with a hope that I might invade the lowlands as Rob Roy occasionally stole into Glasgow. A morning of gauzy mist followed a night of white frost. The autumn fires glowed on hedge and wood, and a white road went into the mistiness that lay over the next ridge. Every new height we attained brought us to a wider world and a bluer heaven, and numbed life bestirred itself. At last we got to the broad flat summit of the Downs. The mounds around told of vanished folk, but nothing more than that they had been and that some had been great. The moor birds ran fussily in front of us, took to wing, whirred and cackled ; a leisurely wind with a tooth in it swerved the grass as it passed over, whistled with an apparent impatience and ill-humour through the fences which the evil mind of fallen man had set up to mark his possessions, but passed in a more friendly sough by the hay ricks. A vast expanse of brown and red and yellow, with patches of dark green woodland, sunlit spots glittering amidst duller cloud-shaded stretches, and bounded by far-off mists and softened by a veil of the most exquisite grey gauze, held us in its keeping.

“ Elections were already the frettings of another life. We filled our lungs with the cool, refreshing air, and our eyes with the beauty of the wide scene ; we threw wide our arms to the rolling Downs and the serene sky, and sung contentment. Existence was enough. Here was the abiding and forgiving friendship. But we cannot, thank goodness, keep man and his ways and his strivings away from us for long. Here, however, we can laugh affectionately at his follies. We went down to where it is said Guinevere retired to end her days and do penance, but when we asked of a maid where the church was she said, ‘ Next door,’ directing us to as ugly a box in brick as was ever put up by sincere hearts guided by a bad architect. No spirit of Arthur’s erring queen was there. We did our pilgrimage, however, and later on when filling our wallets with the bread that perishes we were not surprised to be told that in a place which has no reverence for itself ‘ British traditions ’ were nobly upheld against ‘ foreigners and traitors ’ at the recent election ! Poor Britain to be so served !

“ The afternoon was like unto the morning, only more mature and matronly in its calm and its colour. Our greatest remnant of ancient worship stood out in its moor, peculiarly austere and detached in the cold autumn light, but when we fled down the slopes to the thatched cottages in the valleys, and got glimpses of housewives and children and firesides through their open doors, warmth returned. Cosy life and the affections outlast the generations, whether good or bad, and when the moon was up we reached the end of our day’s journey and looked down upon the ethereal towers of the great cathedral, slipped through its gates and its green, and found our night’s abode.

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“We were on the confines of Avilion ‘where falls not hail nor rain nor any snow, nor even wind blows loudly.’ The lights in the windows overlooking the green, throwing shafts of yellow across the dark; the turrets and towers pale and unsubstantial, almost transparent—where lit by the moonbeams—rising up like souls from the black massed below; the delicate tracery of the branches of the high trees against bright windows and a moon-lit sky; the sound of flowing waters; the chiming of bells; the chanting of psalms up a long shadowy close, surely marked a place where reverence and worship still lingered like the scent of incense. If Avilion ever was it must be still here. Here surely dwelt a happy faith, generous in its judgment and enlightened in its spirit.

. . . . .  
“Nor was the peace marred by the moated and walled palace of the bishop. One could see that the drawbridge and portcullis were, like rusting armour in a museum, emblems of peace. Everything slept in the moonlight. The walls slept; the ruins we could see by peeping through the chinks in the gate, slept; the moat slept; the ducks floating on it slept; a sleep-muffled quack came from the shadowy margin, and the sleepy chirp of a robin came from a bush; the trees slept; the moon kept peaceful watch and ward; we went on tiptoe and whispered lest we should disturb something sleeping and dreaming of reverence, beauty, and romance.”

. . . . .  
One final question—Has the Man of Tomorrow become the Man of Yesterday? In a sense, yes. We are in 1925, not 1923, and Labour’s first administration has come and gone. To that extent promise has been translated into achieve-



ment, and the achievement, like all achievement, belongs to the past, as well as to the present, into which it has entered, and to the future of which it has laid the foundation. In a more important sense, No. A stage on the road to to-morrow has been accomplished ; a light held up that, if temporarily obscured, glows behind the glass with the promise of fuller brightness. Mr MacDonald's instrument, by trial and by error, has been bur-nished and sharpened for work that no one else can do. He remains at once the Man of To-day and the Man of To-morrow.

*1st January 1925.*





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